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ABSTRACT

This second of three volumes of the 1992 Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) Conference Papers includes 12 papers from workshops, with a national focus. The "Welcome Speech" (Marie Perrson) is followed by "Literacy: An Ecological View" (David Sless) that shares a view of literacy as an interdependent component in a much larger communicative environment. "The Competency Agenda: What Does It Mean for Adult Literacy and Basic Education?" (Mike Brown) sets out a description of the competency agenda as problematic. "Adult Readers' Problems: How a Language-Based Approach Can Help" (Bill Winser) advocates an approach that suggests that teachers and students need to become more aware of the meaning making powers of language. "A Full-Time Literacy Program for Long-Term Unemployed People" (Marian Norton) describes a program that integrates vocational content into a literacy program. "The Right to Literacy--The Rhetoric, the Romance, the Reality, from Policy to Practice--An Industry/Service-Provider Perspective: Literacy and English Language--Social Justice or Economic Imperative" (Wendy Heath, Anne Learmonth) focuses on issues dealing with the development and implementation of the Literacy, English Language, and Numeracy Program in the State Electricity Commission. "Strategic Management in Language and Literacy: Outcomes or Empires?" (Nicole Gilding) explores tensions in adult literacy and complexities facing managers at state and institutional levels. "What Is There to Read?" (Susanne Bruhn) covers the outcome of the National Library's conference, "The Right to Read." "Participant Observation: A Way of Conducting Research" (Jean Serle) describes this technique. "Numeracy and How We Learn" (Jeannette Thiering) describes workshops for teachers of numeracy or general mathematics. "From Radical Rhetoric to the Sobering Reality of Current Policy Options around Adult Basic Education in South Africa" (Marian Clifford) examines trends in adult basic education policy thinking in South Africa in the light of Australian experiences. "NSW [New South Wales] Inmate Education: Literacy in Action in NSW Correctional Centers" (Brian Noad) provides a model. (YLB)

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The Right to Literacy
• The Rhetoric • The Romance • The Reality

1992 National Conference
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Conference Papers
Vol. 2

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ACAL Conference Papers

Volume 2 October 1992

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Foreword

The 1992 ACAL conference, held at Sydney University in October 1992, was a great success. 500 people, from Australia and overseas, attended the conference which was acclaimed for its smooth organisation and stimulating content.

Volume 1 of the Conference Papers includes papers from the plenary and keynote sessions.

This volume, number 2, includes papers from workshops, with a national focus.

Volume 3, a special edition of *Literacy and Numeracy Exchange*, includes papers from workshops with a more local NSW focus.

I would like to thank Simon Emsley, Magnhild Nordland, Inara Walden and Phuong Tran who contributed to the production of these papers. Thanks also to David Sless, Communication Research Institute, for design and layout ideas. (David has a paper appearing in Volume 2.)

Acknowledgements are also made to the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (NSW) who provided funding assistance for the production of these papers.

The papers provide a range of opinions, theories and ideas for practice. They make fascinating reading. Thank you to all who contributed, both at the conference, and through these papers.

Jenny McGuirk

August 1993

NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council Inc.

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Welcome speech

Marie Persson
President, ACAL.

For this, the 16th annual ACAL Conference, I thought it would be useful to spend some time focusing on the development of the Australian ALBE field in general and by implication, the formation of ACAL.

Contrary to the belief that ACAL was formed by a group of do-gooding, missionary, welfare minded zealots, the beginnings of ACAL were found in the visit of Paulo Freire to a World Council of Churches seminar in Melbourne in 1972. His vision of adult education as an agent of social change struck a cord with those working in adult literacy. ACAL was eventually formed in 1976 by a group of adult educators who came together in a special interest group at the annual conference of the Australian Association of Adult Education. They recognised that literacy was a political issue. Theories of social justice and affirmative action underpinned their work and the organisation soon took on an advocacy and lobbying role.

At the same time that ACAL was being formed, there was a major push to expand adult literacy provision in Australia. The push emanated from the outcomes of the Richardson Report (1975), which criticised the TAFE sector for its lack of involvement in adult literacy provision and the Cadman Report (1976) which recommended that TAFE authorities take a clearer lead in adult literacy programs.

In a wider context, the Kangan Report (1975) was a third influential government report in that it legitimated political and institutional commitment to the principles of 'access and equity'. It provided literacy workers with the opportunity to place adult literacy in the mainstream of affirmative action initiatives.

The mid 80s saw a rapid investment in the field with the National Policy on Languages published in 1987. $1.96 million was allocated to an Adult Literacy Action Campaign. For the first time significant funds were allocated to national projects such as research, publications and planning a national campaign in the lead up to ILY. The 10 years of lobbying by ACAL had paid off and ACAL had a major role in deciding how the funds would be spent.

The late 80s saw the advent of award restructuring and industry reform and the recognition of the centrality of language and literacy to the skilling of the Australian workforce. This recognition led to the Finn Review, the Mayer Committee's work on the development of employment related key competencies and more recently the Carmichael Report.

The success of ACAL's lobbying phase and the tying of award restructuring to skills development through training, culminated in the major Commonwealth initiative of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP) announced by Minister Dawkins in September 1991.

Currently, we are witnessing a number of significant achievements in the field:

- the National Framework for Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy will make outcomes of curricula explicit and provide a useful reporting mechanism.
- the ALLP itself, the outcome of many years of ACAL lobbying, has provided the field with policy direction, if not strategic implementation. The field has become increasingly professionalised with teachers understanding the need to articulate the theories underpinning their practice.
- and finally we have developed new partnerships including the formation of the Australian Literacy Federation, a coalition of English language and literacy teachers and partnerships in new contexts; the workplace and employment related training.

What are the implications for ACAL's role in the 90s? Ten years ago ACAL was really the only focus for policy formation, professional development, research and development of theory and good practice, lobbying governments and organising the field. We have worked hard for recognition of the need for services to students, pre-service training and professional development of teachers and in general to put adult literacy and basic education on the national agenda. During ILY, ACAL was the key source of ideas and contacts for the Commonwealth. In fact it could even be argued that the Commonwealth bureaucracy was reliant on ACAL. Not so now. Since the delivery of the ALLP there has been a notable distancing from the Council.

Although adult literacy is now embedded in government policy (however tenuous), ACAL has to look again at its role. So what is our future?

1. ACAL has made tremendous efforts to deliver principled advice following from explicit documentation. Contrary to the claims of some, ACAL is committed to continuing to be the disinterested party. We do not have sectoral interests, we represent the field. This role of being able to give disinterested advice is all the more important given the Commonwealth policy of submission based funding, which has led to increased competitiveness where territories must be protected. ACAL's advice comes from a basis of commitment to teachers and students and is without vested interests.

2. Secondly, ACAL must continue in the direction accelerated this year, of publicly explaining its position to the field. The critique of the ALAN scales was in fact a statement about good practice in assessment and reporting and soon to come will be the strategic planning document arising out of a recent ACAL forum in Adelaide.

3. Thirdly, our efforts must continue to be on demanding quality provision in a myriad of contexts. ACAL is your advocate and by focussing our concerns on quality issues we are serving the interests of those who have been unable to attain basic education skills required in our highly complex society. We need to be aware that a number of basic education programs are being delivered outside of an educational context especially those catering to the labour market. We must continue to highlight the link between literacy and jobs, recognising that employment is not a literacy issue, it is an employment market issue. Literacy programs have multiple outcomes and we need to emphasise the broader outcomes, not narrow skills acquisition.

There are still no short cuts, no quick fixes. ACAL embraced industry restructuring for its potential to increase ABE provision. We have embraced Competency Based Training because of its emphasis on articulated education from schooling to the tertiary sector and beyond - it is a lifelong learning notion. We do however stress the need for

caution that CBT and industry restructuring do not disadvantage those with poor literacy and numeracy skills.

4. Finally, ACAL must continue to foster a closer relationship with our ESOL colleagues. We have much in common - a shared history, a shared concern for our client groups, a shared concern for quality delivery. There is much we can do together to improve the access to and quality of service. We must help deflect the growing tension caused by those who only recognise the similarities and not the differences; a blinkered recognition for bureaucratic not educational reasons. We must be quite clear that the contexts are different, the students have different as well as similar learning needs and any coming together of the two fields is for sound educational reasons not for reasons of bureaucratic convenience.

I have been very proud to be associated with ACAL as a member for many years and as President for this last year. I hope that those of you new to the field will also have a long association with the Council. I look forward to participating in discussions over the next 3 days that ignore the rhetoric, put the romance into perspective and focus not only on the reality but on a vision for the future.

Literacy: an ecological view

David Sless
Communication Research Institute of Australia

Ecological metaphor

Why is it productive to think about literacy in ecological terms? Is this just a trendy and politically correct way of seeing everything as to do with The Environment, or is there a more profound reason?

I am, of course, savouring a rare moment in my professional life when I might be seen to be both trendy and on the side of the goodies. But beyond the moral thrill of the moment—a temporary suffusion of virtuous light into my otherwise blackened soul—I am excited at the prospect of being able to share with a wider audience a view of literacy as an *interdependent* component in a much larger communicative environment.

The currently fashionable interest in The Environment has made *interdependence* a concept for our time. No longer do we see the world only in terms of simple cause effect relations, but we now see, and expect to see, that all things are in some sense *interdependent* and *interrelated*. Empty the CFC from the air conditioner, and the ozone hole grows, dangerous ultra violet comes streaming in from the sun, and we get skin cancer. This sense of interrelated events in a complex system has become part of the intellectual framework of our time. I can therefore use this ecological way of understanding as a productive metaphor for understanding literacy within a much larger system.

The ecological metaphor allows us to see the interdependence between the different elements of the system. Ecology has taught us to think holistically, and has shown us the value of avoiding reductionist ways of thinking. It has shown us that we cannot usefully examine any one element whilst ignoring its position in an overall environment (how it fits in, and how it affects and is affected by its surroundings); and it has shown us how changes in one part of a system affect all other parts of the system.

Just as we cannot fully understand a single organism in isolation, so we cannot understand any particular phenomenon of literacy or illiteracy. We

must take the system as a whole, and examine the relationships between the literate and the illiterate, between writers and readers, and between all these and the political, economic and social environment in which we are all to be found and within which we interact.

Is literacy a reader's problem?

When people talk about a 'literacy problem', they generally mean that there are many people who lack adequate reading skills which make it difficult for them to work productively or manage their domestic and social life. They cannot read such things as office memos, procedure manuals, Social Security letters, telephone books, instructions on household products, medicine packaging (Wickert 1989), and the myriad of forms from both the private and public sector without which our information intensive society would grind to a halt.

Literacy problems arise with these prosaic yet essential aspects of life. The solutions to the problem tend to centre around giving people reading skills: dealing with the reader in isolation from the rest of the system.

But literacy is as much a problem for the writers of these ordinary forms of communication as it is for the reader: that is, the people who produce these texts are as much part of the literacy system as those that read them. Yet literacy is seen as a problem for the reader rather than the writer: the victim rather than the perpetrator.

Many of you at this conference spend a great deal of your time helping readers. I and my colleagues spend much of our time between the world of the writer and reader. We help organisations write and design documents that are potentially readable. Among the documents we have helped create are such things as the Telecom Bill, the Simplified S form (before it turned into the monster of the Tax Pack), and the NRMA insurance policies and application forms (Penman and Sless 1992). As part of this work we also spend time sitting alongside readers, watching how they use these documents and discussing with them their reading difficulties. Frequently, we are the go-between. We represent the interests of the reader in environments where they are unrepresented. We look at where readers fail to use documents appropriately and we then take news of this back to the authors, to persuade them that the documents have to be changed.

We see the struggle after meaning, comprehension, and social control at a crucial point in the communication environment—at the juncture between individuals and large organisations. Nature, red in tooth and claw has its equivalent in our communication environment in the form of culture, dark in power and control. We might stand in awe at the majesty and mystery of nature. We frequently stand in frustration at the incomprehensibility and power of our social formations. The communicative world, like the natural environment, can at times seem like a merciless, uncaring wilderness.

A brutal fact of our communicative environment, when seen at this critical juncture, is that incomprehension and misunderstanding are the norm not the exception. For every one of the documents we have helped improve, there stand many hundreds if not thousands that remain darkly incomprehensible—the visible manifestations of uncaring power.

Very few people in these large and powerful organisations are aware of the extent of the problem. For us it is a matter of daily experience. A fairly typical example was the work we undertook for a medium-sized insurance company to improve the quality of its main business forms, those used to apply for an insurance policy (Fisher and Sless 1990). At the start of the project we measured the error rate of the forms. In a sample of 200 forms taken at random from the files, we found errors on 100% of the forms. The average was over 7 errors per form. In total there were 1560 errors on the 200 forms. Interestingly, these forms were mainly filled out by insurance agents, not the public. The underwriters in the company, whose job it was to assess each application form, attributed the high error rate to the lack of professionalism on the part of the agents—a clear case of blaming the victims. Senior management in the company were unaware of the problem until we published our results. In fact, the forms were fairly typical of the poor design of documents found in both the private and public sectors. 100% error rate is not unusual. The only thing that was unusual in this case was the willingness of the organisation to allow us to publish the results. Once the forms were improved the error rate went down to 15%. On a similar sample taken after the improvement program there were a total of only 44 errors, a massive improvement of 97.2%.

For those of you who help readers cope with this type of document in its natural unimproved state, you will know that the struggle is one-sided.

Some of these documents are so incomprehensible that no amount of literacy training of readers will help. The real need in this case is training for the writers.

Some differences

As with any metaphor, however, there are points where the analogy breaks down. Often these points are extremely interesting and merit close enquiry. In my analogy between ecosystems and literacy systems, there are three important areas of difference.

Firstly, ecosystems are *deterministic* (I will not enter into any discussion about the Gaia theory): on many levels predictable, at certain levels unpredictable, but nevertheless following formulated and theoretically measurable mechanical and biological laws. Our communicative environment, on the other hand, is *non-predictable*: it does not come into the category of scientific phenomena, and it is based on humanly-created rules, not on immutable physical laws.

Not everyone involved in communication or literacy research would agree with me. Many have a substantial investment in the scientific method, as a means of solving problems and discovering truth. They regard the failure of the field to offer scientifically predictable results as a temporary setback in the long march of science. They believe that new methods and new concepts (and more research funding) will lead in the end to truth. Ironically, perhaps, my scepticism of science arises from the evidence, whilst the advocates for science base their belief and optimism on faith.

But if I am correct, and we are dealing with a system of rules made by people, then we are also dealing with a system in which we have the power to change the rules, subvert them, or use them in ways never intended by their creators. Literacy is a continually changing practice and the changes are brought about by human action.

Secondly (given some reservations about scientific detachment and objectivity), a scientist can, in principle, develop a reasonably accurate and full picture of an ecosystem. But it is not remotely possible to develop such a picture of a literacy system. An ecologist is of course often part of the ecosystem he is studying, and as such cannot be totally objective; but the

person studying a literacy system can have no neutrality at all: what we see depends wholly on where we are standing, what we are looking for, and what skills we have. It is not possible to enter a literacy system without some skills in reading. As readers we work within the system, as part of the system, never as observers of the system. We are always participants.

The consequences of our participatory status is that we need a special way of understanding literacy systems which take account of our position and that of others relative to us within the system. We need a logic of positions, a way of mapping the world as we see it from our position in the landscape (Sless 1986). In particular we need to understand that there are always many aspects of the system which are hidden from view, that we can neither see nor comprehend.

One of the most common reasons for literacy failures is because writers cannot put themselves in the position of their readers. This is not necessarily because they lack skill or sensitivity, it is simply a fact of the logic of positions. Writers can only begin to overcome this problem if they recognise that they are in a *particular* position, and that this is problematic by its very nature.

Thirdly, events in an ecosystem always leave material traces. Events in literacy systems do not necessarily leave a trace. Administrative forms are an exception to this rule. We can observe and measure some of the problems people have with forms because of the written traces left behind when people try to complete them. But with most documents we are faced with an inscrutable, ineffable consequence whose history is invisible and non-describable.

The inequity suffered by a social security claimant because she could not understand her rights has a social consequence, but it would be hard to trace the inequity back to an incomprehensible pamphlet. Incomprehension and reading failure leave few tangible traces in themselves, though our society is littered with the social debris of failure and incomprehension; like a silent explosion, no explosive remains, no ear-shattering sound, only the rubble and shrapnel.

All these things—the non-predicability, the limitation of position, and the lack of trace left by failures to read and understand—make our collective

task of fighting for a better literate environment that much harder. At times the tendency to focus on the victim rather than the system is overwhelming.

Poor theory

The existence of a non-predictive, highly subjective, ineffable system is an open invitation for all kinds of explanatory theories. Whilst my ecological metaphor will avoid the dangers of reductionist or over-narrow explanations, it does not guard against over-complex ones; and regrettably, the literacy debate has spawned theory which has given us a huge over-arching conceptual vocabulary, but a deplorably poor capacity to relate theory to practice.

We need to keep our feet firmly on the ground, and we have a right to expect theory that will help improve practice. There are plenty of theories in the realm of sociolinguistics, cognitive science, and cultural studies that can make us feel as if we *understand* literacy better: they wrap the problem in a cocoon of clever concepts. But if they do not lead to better practice then our adoption of them is mere self indulgence

Here are a few simple tests you can apply to any theory to find out whether it is worth while.

The museum test

Sociolinguistic theories provide us with elaborate conceptual schemes for classifying linguistic objects, much in the way that a curator uses a taxonomy in a museum to order the exhibits. The curator's purpose is to classify things within a museum in relation to each other. So the classification system is designed to work only in the museum. But suppose you had a museum of live things, that stayed for a while but then had to be returned to their natural habitat. In such a circumstance, the curator's taxonomy would be of little value. It would not tell you how to return the exhibit to the world. The curator's taxonomy only works in one direction.

If you are using a sociolinguistic theory that only allows you to organise things—to understand them like museum exhibits—but doesn't tell you how to use them successfully in the world, then you have a poor theory to guide practice.

The post factum test

There are many twentieth century theories that can only explain what has happened, never tell you what will happen. The most popular of such theories is psychoanalysis, which can give a wonderfully convincing account of why someone did something, but it cannot predict with any reliability what they will or should do next. Such theories seem very plausible because of their apparent explanatory power. But the power is illusory since, again, it only works in one direction.

The complexity test

The world is very complicated and life is short. Theory should help us synthesise the complexity and make it easier to deal with. If you are using theory that is more complicated than the world, and which adds to your work but doesn't improve what you do, you might want to reconsider your choice of theory. Such theories are fine for people who want to work something to death, but they are no good for people who need to make things work.

Units of analysis

The central question in any field is: what are the units of analysis (Sless 1978)? What is the smallest unit that we can study without becoming guilty of reductionism?

In traditional communication studies there are three basic elements: a text, an author, and a reader (often described as message, sender and receiver), each of the three taken independently of the others.

There are many problems with this analysis. I have discussed elsewhere (Sless 1986) the dangers of reducing communication to these elements, and this is not the place to rehearse the arguments in detail. Briefly, it is clear that a text (message) cannot be described in isolation—it exists only insofar as it is being written or being read, and its meaning arises as a relationship between itself and its author or reader. Thus any analysis of a text must include its author or its reader. There are, then, two useful units of analysis, both relational: the author/text relation and the reader/text relation.

However, most professional communicators tend to follow the traditional way and concentrate on one part of the relationship only, the text, as if by

some magical means the meaning lies in the messages and is not a function of what people do with messages. In the field of literacy, this error is particularly manifest in the Plain English Movement. The basic principle of the Plain English Movement is that certain ways of expression are difficult to understand; and they are difficult to understand *not* because of their content, *not* because of their context, *not* because of their authors' conceptions or their readers' expectations, knowledge, or assumptions, but simply because of the structure, grammatical rules, length and etymology of the words or sentences themselves. Fiddle about with the text and the meaning becomes clear for all.

Alas for the Plain English Movement! Language doesn't work like that at all, and if only these well meaning advocates would go out and test their ideas with readers they would see this. The experience of, for example, the NRMA, who had all their insurance documents rewritten into Plain English, was that it made no difference to policy-holders, who still could not come to terms with insurance law, with answering the kinds of questions insurers ask, or with most of the other complexities of insurance forms (Penman 1990) This is not surprising. The Plain English Movement, like so many other professional message-makers, concentrates on the message or text and completely ignores the other side of the relationship, the reader.

Because reading is both idiosyncratic and highly contextualised, there are no clear ways of anticipating how something will be read. If you want to find out about readers and what they do with texts you have to observe reading in practice. Let me give you two recent examples of reading practice that could not have been anticipated from theory or principles of Plain English.

Anti-smoking campaigners have suggested using the phrase
SMOKING CAN BE FATAL
on cigarette packets. But the word 'fatal' is not present in some teenagers' vocabulary. The only context in which they have seen the word is in the film title *Fatal Attraction*. They take the word to be something associated with being sexy. They might therefore read the warning as:
SMOKING CAN BE SEXY.

I would argue that this specific reading is not predictable by any theory or principles of writing, only by direct engagement with reading in context.

Here is another example. We recently helped the South Australian Government develop a water rates bill for a new rating system. Prior to our involvement there had been a major ongoing media battle between the government and the public, aided and abetted by the opposition, about the seeming unfairness of the new system. There was even a court case in which ratepayers alleged that the government was overcharging for water. The case was lost, but significantly, two of the judges in their written judgement seemed not to understand how the rating system worked.

One of the central concepts of the new rating system was an access rate, a fixed charge that covered the cost of water brought to a property. Apart from that, users pay for water they use. Previously they had to pay excess if they exceeded a water allowance.

We developed some prototype bills and explanations of the new controversial rating system and we asked ratepayers to read the explanations we had prepared and explain them to us in their own words.

We discovered that a proportion of ratepayers did not have the word 'access' in their vocabulary. The nearest word in their lexicon was the term 'excess'. Thus many of the ratepayers were angry ; they did not understand why they were having to pay *excess* water rates when they hadn't used much water. Once we called it a supply charge, the problem disappeared.

Once again, I would argue that we could not have discovered the confusion between 'excess' and 'access' on the basis of any theory, but only by direct engagement with ratepayers trying to make sense of their rates bill.

Two relationships

Thus we see how important it is to deal not with isolated elements but with relational units. Looking at the text on its own did not tell us how it was going to be read. Only when we observed the relationship between the text and the reader did we understand what was happening and how to improve it.

To return to the ecological metaphor, most research in literacy is concerned with the reader/text relationship: how to give the reader skills in interpreting and using text. The ecological metaphor tells us that the author/text relationship is equally important. If I can extend the metaphor slightly:

the upstream activity of writers creates the effluent that readers are forced to digest. I think you would agree that readers deserve a better diet. But we won't get better reading matter unless we are prepared to engage in a battle with the powerful organisations responsible for the effluent.

Current practice

Thus the state of current practice in the area of public communication is of great relevance to people in Adult Literacy programs, since, as I have been explaining, this other side of the equation is a vital part of the whole system. Teaching people to read, and, just as important, teaching them *what* to read, can have negative consequences if in their turn they do not come across readable material (and by 'readable', as I hope I have made clear, I do not simply mean 'written in short words and simple sentences'). Thus the job of adult literacy is made harder or easier by the writing practices of government and business.

And I am sorry to say that current practice is not good.

The rules of good usage which Plain English advocates have been known for a long time, long before the advent of the Plain English Movement. The fact that Plain English was felt to be needed as a specific initiative tells us a lot about the literacy of many of the writers in the public service and business.

That Plain English has not got it quite right does not deny the great need for change. What is needed is not plain language but *appropriate* language: language that can be understood in context, and shown empirically to have been understood.

Current practice is poor not only because of the poverty of literacy levels amongst public communicators; it is poor because of the poverty of current ideas about communication. Earlier I mentioned the inadequacy of looking at messages in isolation; but this primitive notion is part of the popular way that communication is described amongst professional communicators. Communication is seen to be 'getting one's message across', and the way to do this is to construct ever more colourful and memorable messages. I doubt if we will see great changes in this area, since the commercial world has invested so heavily in it, and advertising, public relations, and other professional communication bodies play such a vital part in the economy.

Like magic in primitive societies, what matters is the maintenance of the ritual, the token gestures, rather than the efficacy of the practice. And if one witch doctor cannot get even token results, just find another with more powerful magic. Many of the solutions offered by modern practitioners are little more than token ritual gestures.

What can be done

A poor communicative environment does not help literacy. If you want to improve it, you must fight for it. Much can be done to improve the communicative environment by invoking legal controls. Section 52 of the Trades Practices Act is a very useful mechanism in making the relationship between business and consumers more equitable. Put pressure on business through this Act to improve its production of all kinds of texts—labels, bills, circulars, letters and so on.

Unfortunately, there is no equivalent Act to protect us from similar misconduct by the government (Sless 1992). Our rights as citizens are unprotected, there is no recourse in law. The problem is compounded as diminishing resources means less emphasis on good communication in those few areas where goodwill towards the public was apparent. The standard of public documents, never very good to start with, is deteriorating. As citizens we need the same protection in law from abuses by government that we have from abuses by business.

Just to give you some idea of the contrast between your rights as a consumer and your rights as a citizen, in certain contracts between you and a business, ignorance is a defence; if you failed to understand something, you are not necessarily liable. But in *all* of your relationships with government, ignorance is no defence. If you don't understand something, that is your problem.

Being aware of the system as a whole—that illiteracy is as much a writer's problem as a reader's—should give you the impetus to be very vocal in defending your constituency. If our ecology of literacy is polluted by poor writing then we must do something about it. Don't just treat the victims!

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The competency agenda: what does it mean for Adult Literacy and Basic Education?

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Abstract

This paper sets out a description of the competency agenda as problematic. It looks at the way curriculum is derived from practices in the workplace. Subsequently curricula in being competency based are also by definition pre-described and pre-descriptive.

Adult Literacy and Basic Education is seen by the industrial parties as a mass problem requiring large scale solutions and responses. This invokes Fordist responses such as standardised, pre-packaged curriculum and pedagogies. These responses like the work organisation they represent are about controlling the product and the process. In this case the product is the learning and the process is the teaching.

Learning packages are used to illustrate the arguments presented. The de-construction of these materials results in questions and issues being raised on the suitability of these responses and the highly suspect nature of their alignment to workplace reform. In fact, the central questions become: How useful are these materials to learners and the interests of working people? Inversely, what is the nature of the reforms if these materials are considered suitably aligned?

Introduction

As a relative newcomer to the ALBE field, I have been and continue to be engaging with aspects of language and literacy theories that are new to me. However, as an experienced trade teacher in TAFE, and more recently, as a lecturer in work-related learning, I carry around other understandings which I can relate to ALBE. As the implications of industrial reform spreads and impacts on various aspects of our daily lives, my knowledge, developed in part from working in the metal trades, becomes more and more directly applicable.

Of further significance is the organisation and methods of teaching that I now call pedagogies; and with which I was involved as a trade teacher. These are labelled as the self-paced model of competency based training (CBT). Additional descriptors were appended to this already complex title. These described other aspects of this particular model. It was considered to be individualised, modularised and mastery learning. To the college managers and to the never-ending procession of visitors ('the suits'), who were lead through our workshops and classrooms, this approach was considered to be 'state of the art'. For me, however, it remains problematic.

Learning Programs used in Self-paced Trade Courses

Under the self-paced approach to competency based training the intention is for each topic within a course to be addressed through a stand alone learning program. These stand alone learning programs are most often print based texts presented as booklets. They are also available for particular topics in other media such as slide/tape, computer programs and video. The sheetmetal apprenticeship course with which I was involved had 280 such topics. By comparison, the motor mechanics course had 440. Theoretically, the course is not time based, however, funding for apprenticeship training is provided to the college in the order of 120 days.

The CBT models used in trade training have been the forerunners to and the models-in-operation for all work-related learning.

Reviewing a self-paced program

In discussion of these booklets or learning programs it is necessary to differentiate between the use of two different types of texts. Firstly, there is the program and context information (the curriculum setting) and secondly, there is the content of information being presented for learning.

The curriculum setting uses and is arranged under headings like—Objective, Entry Level, Reason for the Program and Prerequisites. By comparison, the information or learning text is presented either as practical instructions for practical enactment or, as a straight informative text. The ABEC framework would call these, 'literacy for practical purposes' and 'literacy for knowledge'.

The format and organisation of the content within these programs are derived from the practices of Instructional design, a sub-category of the broader specialisation of Educational Technology.

To illustrate this discussion, the following example is presented. It is a topic taken from what was, prior to 1991, the first module in the statewide sheetmetal apprenticeship course. It takes the student through the use of a tool for marking out on sheetmetal called a scriber.

This first page shows what I have descrbed earlier as the curriculum setting. The information in this type of text is about the way the learning is organised or is to be carried out.

OBJECTIVE

At the end of this program, given a pre-cut piece of metal 140mm x 100mm, a rule and a scriber you will be able to measure and mark a series of lines within a tolerance of 1mm.

ENTRY LEVEL

For the purpose of this program you will require the ability to carry out simple addition.

If you can not do this item consult your instructor, if you can, continue on.

REASON FOR PROGRAM

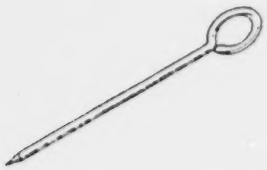
It is important that you are able to use a scriber and rule correctly or you will not be able to build anything accurately.

PRE-TEST

If you can already use a scriber and a rule then consult with your instructor.

Figure 1

RULE AND SCRIBER



Next you will need to know how to use a scriber to mark your metal. A scriber is like a pencil and you mark things with the point. See Diagram D.

When you are marking metal with a scriber make sure the point of the scriber is against the end of your rule.
See Diagram E and F.

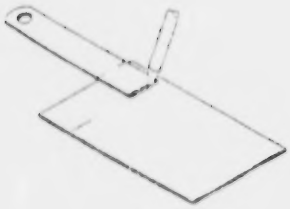


Figure 2. This page exemplifies the second type of text, what has been described as the learning material or information text. The emphasis in these programs is on clarity. This is interpreted to mean the extensive use of graphics and texts which are simplified containing concise (and essential) information.

The pedagogical text is the content for learning. The intention is for this to be transferred off the page into the student's head! Taken for granted is the capacity of the learner to understand such texts.

In this particular case, having read through some four pages of such text the student completes the practical test at the end. This is the performance test to ascertain competence. The student is required to draw lines on the metal at prescribed intervals. The performance is checked through the accuracy of the product and competence is recorded through the teacher signing the student's record book.

Interestingly, this model, and certainly CBT in general, is being promoted as encapsulating the requirements of the workplace reform agendas. It is necessary to articulate briefly what it is that is being presented as reform.

Introduction to workplace reform

The restructuring of Australian industry is occurring under the rubric of economic imperatives. Foremost in this line of argument is the need to improve the country's competitive standing in the global marketplace. Extra burdens are presented as Australia realises its position as part of Asia. As a consequence, the advocates for reform argue that the workplace culture as well as the industrial system in this country, have been built upon and have incorporated many inefficient practices. They extend this to claim that it is high time for these excesses to be routed.

This has lead to the revamping of the entire industrial system. The opportunity was taken to develop and implement what I have called elsewhere the new technology of industrial relations. This includes the structural efficiency principle (SEP) and all its ramifications. The lowering of tariff protection to industry, the restructuring and updating of industrial awards and the training guarantee legislation all have their place alongside these systematic reforms.

Structural efficiency thereotically systematised job classifications and structures for career progression. Under this decision, wage rates, job classifications, skill levels and training are all connected. This industrial connection brought training to the fore.

Subsequently, the vocational education and training systems were developed in order to be compatible. This included standardisation on a national basis. Hence, the evolution of the national training system under the direct auspices of the National Training Board (NTB). The concept of

competency was used to provide the intersection between the interests of employers and those of labour. In addition, it offered commonality between what is at the same time both industrial and educational matter.

The new industrial system is built upon the notion of competence and the further requirement of this being utilised by employers. Workers who possess such abilities are in return rewarded. This should be recognised as being founded upon human capital theory. Without repeating the critique of this theory here, it is enough to say that, unfortunately, the workplace does not work that way. Rather, due recognition and merit like other aspects is subjected to industrial forces. Dominant amongst these influences is the distortion resulting from the power relations manifested by race, class, gender and age.

The Structure of the National Training System

The National Training Board (1991) provided a framework consisting of eight occupational levels. These are known as the Australian Standards Framework or simply ASF levels. Each level is denoted by a brief and very general description called standards. These provide a means of bench-marking across and between industries and occupations.

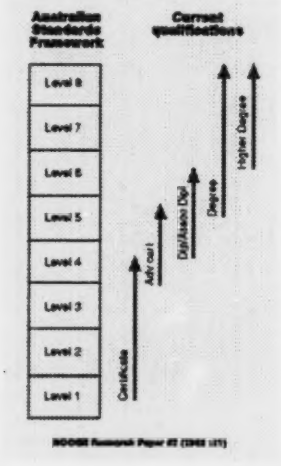


Figure 3. This diagram depicts the relationship between the Australian Standards Framework (ASF) Levels and current qualifications.

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The ASF level is the first step in the more comprehensive and what the NTB calls, a complete standards model.

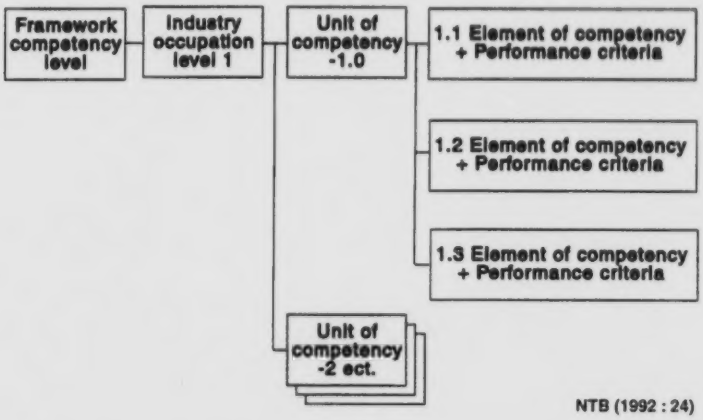

Framework competency level
Industry occupation level 1
Unit of competency -1.0
1.1 Element of competency + Performance criteria
1.2 Element of competency + Performance criteria
1.3 Element of competency + Performance criteria
Unit of competency -2 ect.
NTB (1992 : 24)

Figure 4. This diagram is described by the NTB as depicting a complete standards model. It shows the flow in the development of national competency standards beginning from an ASG competency level and ending with the performance criteria.

This model has been borrowed directly from the UK system of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's). This structure is presently becoming the foundation for all work-related learning in Australia. Interestingly, what was begun in England by the conservative government under Thatcher is being advocated by the ACTU's Laurie Carmichael and the Labor Party's John Dawkins. So what sort of reform are we really implementing?

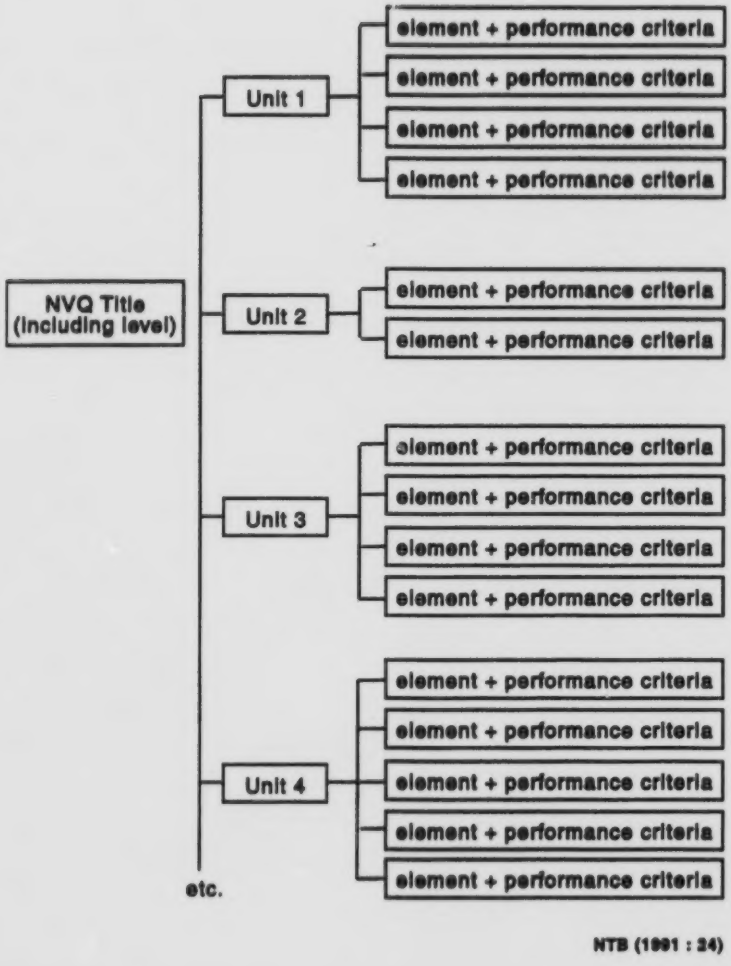


Figure 5. This shows the United Kingdom's model of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's). This is their standardised approach to credentialing. Notice the similarity to the previous model of the NTB. Importantly, the UK model appeared in the NCBQ document Criteria and Procedures and predates the Australian publication by some two years.

The extension of this training approach into the different levels of occupations and fields, including the professions has resulted in it being called by one educator in the UK the 'pedagogy of labour'.

Would you use a national system for qualifications and vocational training developed by this person?
This man did?
And Carmichael said... "Go forth and train"

Figure 6. A collage of cartoons to illustrate the conservative political origins of these training reforms.

The Competency Agenda

The grand plan for the integrated model of work-related learning and industrial relations can be thought of as the interfacing of systems or technologies for these fields. These systems like all technologies, reflect the world view of their designers, or at least those providing the funding. Significantly, this collaboration has an experience base in policy derived from manufacturing industry, industrial law, economics, accountancy and politics. Implicit to the world view of the designers is the bureaucratic wisdom of the last decade, economic rationalism.

The competency agenda is currently being implemented so as to impact on the industrial and educational practices for ALBE teachers as much as it does for the learners. Competency standards for teachers are being developed through projects like:

(i) The 'What is a competent' ABE teacher?' situated at University of Technology Sydney (UTS), and

(ii) the development of competencies for workplace basic education teachers, a project located in Victoria.

While for the course participants, (learners), their learning experiences are being influenced by:

(iii) the Accreditation or Curriculum Framework, sometimes referred to as the ABEC framework,

(iv) the ALAN scales.

This paper presents the position that the application and enactment of the competency agenda to the field of ALBE is counter to the interests of practitioners and learners alike. These initiatives are not reforms but are rather hegemonic. The defining of learning and teaching using competencies has embedded within it an ideology of control intended for the regulation of participants. In a broader sense, the competency agenda is representative of the implementation of neo-Fordist notions of work. What is new about this, is that it is occurring in fields where these approaches have not previously been influential.

Fordism

This term has become synonymous with the organisation of work in the factories of the 20th century. This represents an overstatement of its use. This term has been used to represent so many different aspects that its meaning has become obscured. This paper draws upon four of the more common characteristics.

Firstly, Fordism represents the notion of mass production for mass consumption. The economic advantage sought results from economies of scale. Secondly, a consequence of mass production is a tendency towards product standardisation. In many instances this resulted in investment

being made in single purpose machinery, or 'dedicated' technology. Thirdly, the production methods associated with this approach to work organisation conjure up images of moving conveyor belts and assembly lines. Finally, the division of labour utilised by these production methods allow for this work to be carried out by semi and unskilled workers. This offered incentive and opportunity for the employers to challenge the industrial power and even the ability to replace skilled craft workers. These skilled workers traditionally had exercised their power in determining how their work was to be done and at what pace.

Fundamental to workplace analysis and politics is the transaction that occurs over labour. Workers sell their labour to employers who purchase it. However, this transaction is far from being the end of the matter. The organisation of work or labour process is about extracting and converting labour or the potential to do work into work actually performed. Some labour processes convert this more or less efficiently than others. The production and assembly lines epitomise these attempts as they do also, the resistance of the workers.

It is interesting to review the National Training Board's definitions of competency and a competency, in the light of the labour process debate and the notion of converting labour from potential to actuality.

> ***Competency*** *is the ability to perform the activities within an occupation or function to the standard expected in employment.* (1991: 30)
>
> While, ***a competency*** *comprises the specification of the knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill within an occupation or industry level to the standard of performance required in employment.* (1991: 7)

Training based on these definitions is often described as emphasising outcomes. Learning must be demonstrated and observable. In order to prove that it has happened it must be converted into behaviour and action. Taken uncritically this may appeal to some educators, though on a more analytical level it encapsulates the same philosophy as the employer's side of the labour process debate. Wickert (1992) offers a similar insight when she points out that even the term training, with its connotations of a process, is being replaced by the term skill formation, with its emphasis on an outcome.

Those familiar with the history and evolution of competency statements would be able to situate the statement by the NTB alongside more historical emphases on behaviour, performance and observable outcomes. For some of us, the defining of learning in only these terms remains problematic. Competency reduces learning to that which is directly observable and deemed worthy of reward by employers.

This implicates educators and learners in the struggle over what constitutes 'useful knowledge', the nature and purpose of education, including the methods in which it is operationalised. These are all elements encapsulated within the boundaries of the competency agenda. This paper uses actual examples to illustrate and explore the manner in which this agenda is materialising as practice.

The competency standards identified by the 'What is a 'competent' ABE teacher?' are discussed in relation to the UTS/RMIT workshops which have been developed as a direct training response to the competency standards for Workplace trainers. Discussion will then be directed at the ABEC framework. Finally, some materials will be examined drawn from literacy and language training packages. These packages are being developed as a response to the reform agenda. Central to this review is the question, what type of workplace reform is implicitly represented by the pedagogy and content of these materials.

The discussion will be framed by the criticism that the competency agenda is a strategy for the reform of workers, not reform for workers. It will be posited that the competency agenda is more a strategy aimed at 'the regulation of *variable* capital'.

Competency and the Training Market

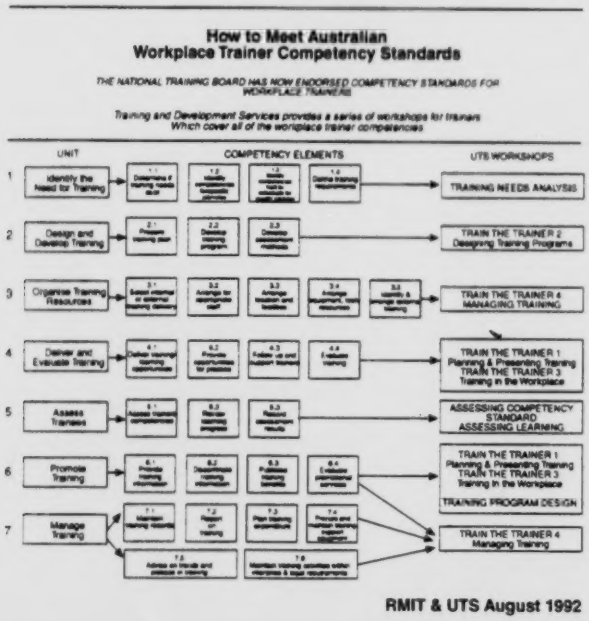
The front cover of a brochure from the Victoria University of Technology has the title: *Tailoring People to Meet Your Needs*. Ironically, this is advertising the Co-operative Education Unit. Not only does this provide an insight into the way in which these educational terms are being co-opted, but offers yet another aspect of the training market.

What philosophy does this reflect for the role of education in the contested relationship between employers and working people? Notice also the co-

option of the term co-operative education. This has traditionally held an entirely different meaning for adult educators.

The Competency Standards for Workplace Trainers and the associated training response.

When competency standards become the driving dynamic for curriculum, program development and content, as previously shown by the trade apprenticeship example, these can become very instrumental.



RMIT & UTS August 1992

Figure 8 shows the relationship between the competency standards endorsed in April 1992 covering Workplace Trainers. There are 7 units of competency for this occupation. Each unit is sub-divided into elements of competency across the page. The right hand column of the page relates each unit to a particular training response or workshop which in this case has been developed by UTS.

This diagram is taken from advertising material for a series of related short courses. This is included as an illustration of how the competency standards, through the units and elements are determining Training responses. In this case, these responses are workshops designed by University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

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Each of these short courses is considered to be a module towards a more substantial program. The workshops for each of the seven modules are either two or three days in length. The cost of the two day programs is $500 and for three days this becomes $750. The course, Train the Trainer 1 is considered a core module and along with any other three of the modules satisfies the requirements for the awarding of a Certificate of Training Development. This qualification is available from both UTS and RMIT.

This is an illustration of what is being fostered through the government rhetoric advocating the development of a training market. For $2500, attendance at ten days worth of training courses, and no requirements for pre-requisites, people can enrol, participate and gain credentials from a University, directly related to the competency standards for this occupation. Presumably becoming a certificated Workplace Trainer, a qualification related to ASF level 4. This mini case study may have some implications for ALBE through the 'What is a 'competent' ABE teacher?' project.

What is a 'competent' ABE teacher?

It is important to qualify this discussion from the outset. Firstly, it is the responsibility of each practitioner to examine these standards for themselves and not go on hearsay. Secondly, I must emphasise that the standards on which I am basing this discussion are marked very clearly as a draft. Third, this project has not reached its conclusion as yet and so it would be inaccurate to pre-empt the work so far as definitive conclusions. However, enough is known about the practice of teaching to extrapolate and raise some initial issues. The intention is to make further comparisons with the workplace trainers project. One of the common factors is the involvement of UTS. This suggests that some kind of consistency might be expected in the interpretation of what is a competency standard.

The TAFE teachers union in Victoria, the FTUV, recently outlined their position with respect to the ASF levels and levels of TAFE teachers. TAFE teaching for them would be divided into 4 levels with the addition of AST classification extra. The level 1 on the TAFE teacher scale would be aligned with ASF level 5 up to AST's being set at ASF level 8.

The 'competent' ABE teacher project has argued that the standards that they are presenting are not for beginning or entry level to the classification but

instead presumes middle level competence in the definition by Dreyfeus and also used by Benner. It can be assumed that as some of the ABE teachers are also TAFE teachers then these competencies will reflect ASF level 6 or 7.

The draft standards for the project list seven units of competency. This is the same number as the workplace trainers example considered to be at ASF level 4. In addition, the competency standards for professions document by NOOSR states similarly that the Architects at ASF level 7 & 8 have also decided on 7 units of competency. As the number of competency Units are common, yet the ASF levels differ, this suggests that the units of competency are both qualitatively and quantitatively different. Consequently, a unit of competency is not equal to another unit of competency from another context.

The second point to note on the ABE teacher competencies is the number of units out of the seven in the draft report which have an emphasis on actual teaching. Out of the seven, only one is dedicated to the actual practice of teaching. This might suggest that large discrepancies could exist between what constitutes the content covered by a unit of competence, even within the same project. That one seventh only of a competent ABE teacher's work is about practice might also suggest some kind of split between execution and planning, what Braverman described as a characteristic of Taylorism. The very industrial problems being exorcised by the reform agenda.

The comparison between the standards for trainers and the competency standards developed in the 'What is a 'competent' ABE teacher?' project remains inconclusive until such time as these are finalised and the assumptions within this discussion are confirmed or disproven.

What is the nature of the reforms reflected by this project?

Are these reforms of teachers or for teachers?

The ABEC Framework

The ABEC Framework looks at reading, writing and numeracy. It distinguishes reading and writing each into four different literacies. These are, literacy for *self expression*, literacy for *practical purposes*, literacy for *knowledge* and literacy for *public debate*.

Similarities exist between the epistemological basis of the framework and that which underpins the learning theory of Kolb (1984). This theory has been related to TAFE curriculum by Blachford (1986 & 1987). Blachford elaborated on the work of curriculum theorists like McNeill (1974), Eisner (1977) and others to differentiate between four orientations within the bounds of TAFE curriculum. These were referred to as curriculum as technology (behaviourism), curriculum as cognitive processes, curriculum as humanism and curriculum as social reconstruction.

Interestingly, it is easy to map the four literacies of the ABEC framework onto these curriculum orientations of Blachford. Remembering that Blachford's work was based on the epistemology of Kolb. Literacy for practical purposes related to curriculum as technology. Literacy for knowledge lines up with curriculum as cognitive processes. Literacy for self expression aligns to curriculum as humanism, while literacy for public debate equates with curriculum as social reconstruction.

Each literacy stream is further divided into four levels. In effect, reading and writing are both subdivided into a sixteen cell matrix, though this is emphatically denied by the writers. The following is a descriptor taken from the curriculum framework; each cell of the matrix has a similar criteria.

> *Writing competence: Literacy for self expression*
>
> *Exit level 1*
>
> *Can compose a recount that:*
>
> *(a) presents a single familiar activity, idea or experience;*
>
> *(b) expresses a 'here-and-now' personal perspective;*
>
> *(c) is arranged in simple chronological order, sometimes a long sentence with lots of 'ands' and with uneven accuracy in spelling;*
>
> *(d) is likely to be from 1—2 sentences.*

The ABEC framework is useful in providing common language and organisation to content in the ALBE field, especially for inexperienced teachers. It is possible to think of writing in terms of four forms of literacy and even four levels within each. However, attempts at supplying specific

criteria are detracting . This level of specificity is problematic. In addition, the standardisation of assessment through centrally derived documents is likewise open to debate. For reading, specifications like these are even less credible.

Further complications are added by the people involved in deriving these criteria taking up a position, not even sitting on the fence but instead straddling the fence with a foot in both camps. In some circles, the project workers responsible for setting these specifications would be able to provide more stinging critiques than I can. Yet they choose to play and be implicit in these DEET games. On the one hand those involved are playing a game which has consequences for their own professional standing both positive and negative. On the other hand, it is generally agreed that the field is best served by having these particular people working on the project. These workers, unlike some others, are indeed more challenged by the problematic nature of their endeavours than some others might be in the same position. This becomes an appropriate moment to choose to move the focus of the discussion to the ALAN scales.

The ALAN scales (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Scales) are considered by practitioners to be less than desirable. It was thought that these were being held over the heads or 'in the wings' ready to brought in and imposed, had the ABEC team baulked at the task. ACAL has seen fit to provide an organisational response to the suitability of these scales. (Refer ACAL critique entitled, *The Adult Literacy & Numeracy Scales: the ACAL view*, June 1992)

The workers in each of these projects are trying to get their field covered by converting their programs to comply with the competency agenda. In most cases these people know the limitations of what they are even attempting and their involvement is based on pragmatism and powerlessness by experiencing domination from outside forces. Importantly, both these cases depict practitioners as powerless in the shadow of the DEET spectre of—REFORM (sic) or more accurately 'pseudo-reform'. This, along with the manner in which consultation with the field has occurred, continues to raise the question of what kind of reform are we implementing. Given the position of education to these reforms, what is the nature of the reforms in

which educators are both implicated and subjected (in some instances by their own colleagues)?

Are the framework and competencies open to debate? If so where are the forums? Are democratic processes now taken to mean the dissemination of information?

Packaging ALBE

From pre-specified curriculum it is a short step to pre-specifying pedagogy. Literacy along with training generally is being viewed as a substantial problem. Mass problems call for mass solutions. Fordist notions of mass production for mass consumption are here presented alongside the notion of training packages. This section reviews examples drawn from ALBE packages intended for the workplace. These packages, therefore, are illustrations of training responses in the context of workplace reform. Importantly these responses have been conceived in tripartite arrangements and appear as problematic only to educators.

Figure 9. One of my favourites in this field comes from the Army College of TAFE, Learning Unit 4, on Spelling. The first page lays out the curriculum setting.

> *Unit 4*
>
> *Spelling*
>
> *Outline*
>
> *1. In this unit you will be made aware of the rules used for spelling. These rules will aid you in spelling words effectively.*
>
> *Skills*
>
> *2. The skills covered are:*
>
> *a. the six step plan in spelling a word*
>
> *b. identifying letters and syllables*
>
> *c. the fifteen (15) rules of spelling*
>
> *Equipment*
>
> *3. You will need the following equipment:*

a. pen/pencil and paper, and

b. a dictionary.

Time

4. This unit will take approximately 15 hours to complete.

To Pass

5. To pass this unit you will need to demonstrate that you can spell effectively.

It continues with some 6 points arranged under the heading 'Before you start'. Page 2 lists the contents. This unit consists of three sections, the first is an Introduction. The next is called Rules and Exercises and the final one is called Solutions.

Unit 4: Introduction—The Six Step Plan

1. Some hints to help you learn to spell a particular word:

Step 1. Make sure you understand the meaning of the word—use a dictionary if necessary.

Step 2. Write the word in a sentence, using it correctly.

Step 3. Say the word aloud.

Step 4. Try to see it and hear it in syllables:

re-li-ab-ly gen-u-ine-ly.

Step 5. Spell the word ALOUD three times, saying it each time.

Step 6. Write the word three times.

2. When you have learnt 5—6 words this way:

a. Get someone to test you, or write down all the words from memory and check them.

b. Test yourself within 24 hours on all the words.

c. Have a revision test once a week.

The Building and Construction Industry Training Package Level 1 Communication.

This industry has followed the Metals Industry model for restructuring. They have four streams, and nine levels. The classification structure consists of the generic title Construction Worker (CW) 1—9. Industry specific classifications are bench-marked to the ASF levels though they do not necessarily share the same numeral. Hence, ASF level 3 of tradesperson, in the Metals Industry is denoted by the C 10 classification which is equivalent to CW 4. However, in this instance, level 1 within the Building & Construction industries Classifications is Entry level and this is similarly described through the ASF level 1.

The Training Package

The package consists of three parts.

1. Part A has three sections, Introduction to the Package, Use of the Booklet, and Assessment Competencies.

2. Part B has four sections, Notes for Trainer, Worksheets 1—10, References and Resources, and Word Lists.

3. Part 3 is an information text, excellently presented as a pocket size booklet.

The Introduction states:

> *Three major principles underpin the Building and Construction Level 1 communication booklet and training package.*
>
> *They are:*
>
> *1. That for learning to occur there has to be a CONNECTION between the learner and what has to be learnt.*
>
> *2. That everyone has learning STRATEGIES (however clumsy, inefficient, unusual or lateral they are).*
>
> *3. That the learner must be given CONTROL of and RESPONSIBILITY for their learning.*

These principles are typical of the intentions of most adult educators involved with work-related learning. This section of the paper will look at how this material enacts these principles. The following questions are fundamental to the following discussion.

How does the package make these connections?

How does it recognise and build upon the learners' own strategies?

How does it give control and responsibility to the learner?

The Booklet

The introduction continues with reference to the accompanying booklet within the package.

> *However, the booklet is based on a number of generic communications skills.*
>
> *- The ability to recognise and interpret signs/graphics.*
>
> *- The ability to understand and respond to key instruction words, in English.*
>
> *- The ability to give information orally and in writing about self.*
>
> *- The ability to express ideas.*

The first three of these are about the worker/learner responding in some way to others. Only the fourth locates learners actively in the construction of their milieu.

The texts associated with these types of learning materials vary according to the degree to which they serve as instrumental to the assessment requirements. The booklet is chatty and well presented. It is worthwhile though it generally remains instrumental.

In contrast, the learning materials associated with self-paced, trade training programs reviewed earlier are extremely instrumental, are consequently simplistic, and most often revert to direct instruction. It is interesting though that these have been the basis of, and forerunner to, the approach to training that is presently being implemented nationally.

The choice of content within the communication package is informative. The topic of safety represents an intersection between the interests of workers and employers. Therefore, it becomes a popular subject within the tripartite arrangements now governing curriculum development. However, it must be stated that the employers' interest is partly bound to the cost of compensation and insurance premiums as much as it is with worker safety. Investment in training associated with safety becomes a double bonus for employers.

The Curriculum Documentation

KEY COMPETENCE:

Level 1 Knowledge in listing facts.

Capacity to read, write and speak listing some facts about the topic in simple sentences.

SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES:—

1. Can match the colour with the shape of the four main safety signs.

(The outlines and shape of the signs are depicted and their colour designated).

2. Can give, in English, a one word/phrase, explanation of the four main safety signs.

(The outlines of the signs is repeated and labelled with acceptable examples of one word/phrase labels)

The first diagram has the caption:

FORBIDDEN/NO WAY/DO NOT USE

The second HAZARD/BE CAREFUL/DANGER

The third PROTECTION/MY SAFETY/YOUR SAFETY

The fourth YOUR HEALTH/SAFETY EQUIPMENT/FIRST AID/MY HEALTH

3. Can copy out these key words.

FORBIDDEN

HAZARD

PROTECTION

HEALTH

4. Can recognise out of context, these key site words.

DANGER THIS WAY

ACCESS EXIT

KEEP CLEAR SAFETY

NO ENTRY SITE OFFICE

Figure 10. The Assessment competencies section begins with 'literacy for knowledge', a reference to the Victorian ABEC framework.

Extracts from worksheets 1,3 & 4 are set out below.

Worksheet 1. (EXTRACT ONLY)

Colour in the shapes of the appropriate safety signs and fill in the blanks.

(The outline diagram of each sign is presented. Each has a corresponding label with letters missing to be filled in.)

F O R————————N

H A————

P R————————

H E————

Worksheet 3. (EXTRACT ONLY)

FILL IN THE BLANKS

S—T E K——P

OFF—CE C L——R

E X—T L I—T

D—N G—R N—

SITE LIFT KEEP EXIT

OFFICE CLEAR DANGER NO

Worksheet 4 (EXTRACT ONLY)

COPY OUT THESE WORDS

DANGER _____

EXIT _____

NO ENTRY _____

THIS WAY _____

It is hard to imagine the way in which these materials will fulfil the espoused intentions stated in the opening principles.

These materials show some confused notion that Building workers are going to take responsibility and control for their learning by using coloured pencils on diagrams of safety signs.

A central notion of this paper is that the pathway which allows the industrial parties to convert what is done on the job into curriculum for that work constitutes a system. This system is a form of technology, a technology for curriculum. The training package goes even further and like the self-paced mode of competency based training is an example of a technology for training. In addition, in this model where the learning content is presented as texts to be consumed and mastered, even learning is being considered a type of technology.

Conclusion

The training packages are being designed by instructional designers and educational technologists. The parameters are set by a rationale of efficiency and control. The trainers facilitate the training process by accessing the various parts of the package. The learning programs, the texts, which in the case of the Building & Construction industry example of the pocket sized booklet, often revert to direct instruction. This is used in conjunction with worksheets for assessment. Each question on the worksheet can be directly related to , on the one hand, the specific competencies in the curriculum

document and on the other, to the content provided in the learning text or booklet.

Significantly, a convention governing the design of learning materials provides that no question can be asked of a student for which the answer has not been previously provided. No materials are presented as problems to be engaged with or situations to be investigated. In addition, the text is simplified as a part of the standardisation, which reduces the content to that which is considered essential to answering the assessment requirements. The texts become very simplistic and assessment requirements can easily become trivialised.

Learning is being defined as the ability to recognise the appropriate information and copy this into the appropriate space on the assessment sheet. This is recorded into some kind of centralised data bank and the results accumulate towards recognised credentials. It is not hard to see behind the rhetoric of lifelong learning a pressure to participate in an indeterminate amount of adult schooling, albeit work-related.

The implicit model of teaching practice is being altered by the increasing tendency towards 'the massification of labour'. Educators are the new operatives being deskilled by the design of the technology. The learners are the standardised product moving along the production line. Information, or content is being added on, and fitted to them as they progress from one assembly point to the next.

The designers of such a system remain removed from the process as they are not direct participants. They are neither required to work on, nor travel down this conveyor belt. Instead they call the shots and oversee.

Education is a double edged sword and a site of struggle. It holds the potential to transform power relations and it is this type of political challenge that constitutes reform for radical educators.

What is the model of reform implicit in this model of curriculum development, and in these training packages?

CBT does not represent reform for working people. How can CBT even begin to raise as problematic the power relations within society or within the workplace? It is a contradiction to think that prescriptive curriculum

conceived in a tripartite context is going to tackle the status quo on questions of power. To the contrary, it represents the status quo. Only a curriculum of reproduction can result from the pragmatism and consensus of this approach.

I would like to close this paper with a poem written by a colleague (and friend) who is a lecturer in ALBE at Latrobe University. The poem expresses much about the agenda being set and the positioning of educators and the field. It helps me understand why the 'new times' feel like such hard times.

Final Judge

The teacher wrestles
with invisible, intangibles
of human growth and development
and reaches for help in the tag team match.
Politicians, bureaucrats & administrators
watch from the sidelines
and score the match.
They only count
demonstrated competencies.
There is no place on the scoreboard
for Belief or Confidence,
no points for Perception or Perseverance.
If the teacher strives to touch the rainbow
to know its beauty,
to describe its complexity,
The Watchers are unimpressed...
They reckon that if you can't hit it with a hammer it must be bullshit!' says the battle weary wrestler.
Indeed the Final Judge for this match
sees only that which is countable
and awards the Prizes accordingly.
Yet the same Accountant judges in other games
where billions are built on bull markets,

and there is Trading in Futures & Options.
Here rainbows are not only caught,
but skinned and sold.
Confidence and Belief are stock in trade
and the intangibles of Goodwill
may be valued at thousands.
The Market may be Depressed or Buoyant
and Perception counts for everything.

Peter Waterhouse
August 1992

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Adult readers' problems: how a language-based approach can help.

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"War on Small Deer!

One day Small Deer wanted to go to the other side of the river to eat the sweet fruit there. As soon as he came to the river, the crocodiles put their huge heads up out of the water.

"War on Small Deer! War on Small Deer!" they roared.

One crocodile rushed out of the water to bite Small Deer.

Small Deer pushed a small stick in the crocodile's mouth.

Then Small Deer cried, "You bit my leg. Let go! Let go!"

The crocodile was fooled. He thought the stick was really Small Deer's leg. So he bit down hard on the stick.

All the other crocodiles laughed. Now, when crocodiles laugh, they shut their eyes. When they had all shut their eyes, Small Deer ran away.

But he still wanted the sweet fruit on the other side of the river."

From: Goodman, Y. M. & Burke, C. L. (1972) Reading Miscue Inventory (Readings for Tapin). New York: Macmillan.

An adult reader, a student at a TAFE college, was asked to read this text, as part of a study of reading strategies in children and adults. The text was successfully read by some other readers in the sample of 40 who were in the study, most of these being primary school students. This reader, a young man in his twenties doing a certificate course for one of the service industries, had already approached the College's Learning Centre for assistance with literacy skills. He was not happy about being asked to read it. He asked me if he had to read all of it (there were three more pages), and said that he didn't know whether he could, because it was too long, and because I was going to ask him 'what happened'. I had indeed said to him previously that I would ask him to 'tell me what you've read so far', at

various points in the reading. This, together with the size of the text, was perceived to be very threatening, so he next mentioned to me that he needed to leave the College shortly. I eventually persuaded him to attempt a reading and he did manage the task of reading this text with a moderate level of proficiency.

What lies behind this reader's behaviour? Where does the problem lie? Does he lack knowledge about what is required of him as a reader? Is it a lack of skill? He plainly is aware in some way of the task and perceives it as being beyond his competence and this has resulted in a lack of confidence in himself as a reader.

In a language-based approach to reading we will put the emphasis on the texts read and the language features of the texts, the latter being less obvious and partly invisible. What is lacking in many existing approaches to reading is this language dimension, which is the essential 'raw material' of the texts adults read, and which carries the essential code that readers must crack if they are to be successful readers. Behind every text that readers have to interpret is the language system, from which the writer has made a series of choices to construct the message of the text. By examining how texts make meaning we will clarify some of the essential elements in reading and will describe those aspects of the task that are likely to present problems to adults. Within the framework of this approach to reading some appropriate teaching strategies for adult readers with problems will then be presented.

Functional literacy

If we are concerned with reading then a minimum goal for adults is sometimes called 'functional literacy'. This ambiguous term can conceal a lot. It is sometimes used to refer to a minimum level of proficiency such that the adult can read signs displayed publicly, some newspaper advertisements, and documents in use in local services such as libraries, those sent from a school, or some texts that are used in the workplace. What is problematic about the expression 'functional literacy' is that it begs the question of definition of reading competence and can be used covertly to set boundaries to the reader's abilities. Only some 'public' texts are likely to be accessible to a poorly skilled reader and these are the texts that are closest to the contexts where the adult is most likely to have made progress in

reading — everyday circumstances and personal experience associated with the home or with close family and friends, or with the local environment. Now it is clear that the language of everyday life and personal experience is supported by the familiar contexts in which typical texts are used. But the move into the public arena involves a shift into another set of context types that are very different, and consequently the texts used in the new situations will differ.

There are two aspects involved here. First, the more-public texts are intended to function in relative independence from their immediate context, whereas texts in more familiar environments can be interpreted more easily from the known environment. Thus the more familiar texts are likely to be more 'spoken' — using language features characteristic of dialogue, where meaning is constructed in relation to familiar situations and from feedback from the other person. The more public texts are intended to stand alone and not rely so heavily on their immediate environment, so that different strategies are called into play to read them.

Second, but related to the first factor, it is likely that readers' 'coding orientation' (Bernstein, 1971, 1990; Sadovnik, 1991) will affect their ability to tackle more than the most familiar of texts. Bernstein's important notion refers to one's ability to construct and interpret texts where meaning is presented explicitly, using textual devices that free the text from an immediate relationship with its situation, so that listeners and readers who are distant from that situation can still understand it. Narratives as well as factual, technical texts are important examples of text types (genres) where this ability to abstract away from immediate, individual experience is crucial if they are to be interpreted successfully.

Characteristics of adult problem readers

In our culture there is an expectation that the schooling system will equip children with proficiency in reading at primary school, with the secondary school adding competence in literary studies. Adult poor readers are therefore very different to children with reading difficulties, since they will have:

- greater knowledge and experience of the world

- awareness of failure with a valued skill
- low levels of confidence in themselves as readers.

Adults' greater maturity means that they will bring a large store of knowledge to the texts they wish to read so that teachers will need to respect and acknowledge this strength and take care to choose texts that reflect adults' wide knowledge. Their self-awareness and lack of confidence, however, are factors that call for great sensitivity in dealings with them in learning situations.

Reading development - a continuum?

Reading development becomes an issue when we consider adults with reading difficulties. Is reading learned gradually, over a period of time? Or does it develop relatively quickly over a short space of time? What is it that develops in reading? To answer this question we need to model reading itself. One important aspect to clarify is the notion of written language, since reading involves the ability to interpret written text. There is plainly some knowledge about written language that is a necessary part of reading development, and this knowledge is not gained from experience with spoken language. This is because written language has different characteristics to spoken language (Halliday, 1985a; Hammond, 1990). In particular, reading involves an ability to segment the sound stream of speech into phonemes, an activity which is quite unnatural in speaking and listening. There is therefore a metalinguistic awareness that is part of the development of reading competence. Readers must know about those features of written language that enable written texts to provide their own context and construct meaning in ways peculiar to the written mode. This awareness includes making judgements about language itself, such as the structure of a text, and its grammatical features—"the ability to treat language itself objectively and to manipulate language structures deliberately" (Ryan & Ledger, 1984, p 165).

As well as knowledge about writing readers also need to have skills or strategies that enable them to decode print and to construct meaning. Fluent readers make minimal and highly efficient use of visual cues and have automatised their decoding abilities so as to free themselves to use semantic

and grammatical features of the text. They can, therefore, focus on the word level, sentence level and whole text levels, a strategy which is an essential aspect of successful reading. Some readers are not aware of the significance of these levels in reading and this may be a contributor to their lack of proficiency (Winser, 1991, 1992).

Most important is the reader's use of the context of situation underlying the text. The ability to articulate a text with its own environment, creating meaning 'from the friction between the two' (Halliday, 1985b p 47), is probably the essential component of reading skill. This environment includes the types of situation which engendered the text and also the texts that were in existence at that time and that are likely to have influenced it. So the environment of a text consists of both the situation in which it occurred (context of situation) and any related texts (intertextuality).

A final aspect of reading development concerns readers' attitudes towards themselves as readers. The early acquisition of competence in reading feeds back into the learner's sense of achievement and builds up into a positive sense of themselves as readers. Continual failure to acquire this most basic of school skills erodes self-confidence and is likely to generate the sort of behaviours that were evident in our TAFE reader above.

All of these features of reading will have to be allowed for if we are to understand adults' reading problems. What is needed first is a reading model that is able to deal with all the levels of text including phonemes, words, sentence and text levels. It must take into account the shift from spoken to written language, based on the differences and similarities between the two, a shift which is a cultural one that opens up a world of new ways of meaning for the literate person. Then it will be possible to address adults' reading problems directly.

A good deal of evidence from psycholinguistic models suggests that reading is mastered all of a piece and is acquired as a single or whole competence, while other models decompose it into a set of subskills that are learned separately and gradually combined into a whole. Whichever of these models is adopted there remains the problem of dealing with adults who have moved well beyond the life situation of younger children. They cannot be treated as children, of course—their situation is very different. If we can

explain reading development more fully, by reference to the language system which underlies the texts and thereby complement existing models, we will be able to decide on ways to support adult readers at their point of development.

Aspects of theory relevant to reading

Existing models of reading tend to be dominated by psycholinguistic approaches. These put an emphasis on the reader as processor of textual information. They tend to stress either the print as basis for reading (the 'bottom up' models), and emphasise the need to decode, or reader's knowledge that is brought to the task (the 'top down' models). The latter stress the importance of the reader's existing knowledge and their ability to use context. Another position (the 'interactive' model) takes both 'top down' and 'bottom up' aspects of reading into account and models the two aspects as interacting with each other. These models have little to say about aspects of texts other than the word; they sometimes take the sentence into account, and there is some treatment of the whole text. However, these models have very limited ways of explaining how readers use word, sentence and text levels, together with elements of the situational and cultural context, to build up meaning as they read.

A sociolinguistic approach to reading puts an emphasis on text as an instance of the language system, functioning in context. The language system is to be understood as operating in socio-cultural settings as a resource and a means of social action, rather than a set of rules to be kept. The systemic-functional model of language (Halliday, 1985b) is an example of language that is modelled in this way. In it language operates as a system from which we make choices according to the function of language we need. These choices vary according to the context:

- At the cultural level there is genre — the aspect of texts where social purpose and ideology are apparent, these being realised in the habitual, repeated patterns or structures of the texts we use every day. A casual conversation, a visit to the doctor, or a letter or formal essay all reflect different socio-cultural purposes and are structured accordingly in characteristic patterns.

• At the situational level there is register — the actual features of language varying according to situation type, with three variables in the situation (field, tenor, mode) affecting the choices made from the system. Imagine this text:

'Beware of falling objects'

What is likely to be its context? We might imagine a road sign or perhaps a building site as situational contexts where this text would make sense. In fact I read it with some astonishment on the side of a plane's overhead luggage compartment on a recent flight. It was perfectly functional there, for unwary passengers could be injured if the door was opened carelessly. It was, therefore, easy to interpret in its situation of use — although there was some interference from a similar text I had read while driving recently. This was a sign on a coast road alongside steep rocky cliffs; it read 'Do not stop - falling rocks'.

As well as this intertextual aspect of context there is an aspect of context that is peculiar to written texts: writing sets up its own context by using language features that enable the text to stand on its own. While speech, typically occurring in dialogue form, depends on immediate context to make meaning, a written text must be interpretable beyond its immediate context of production. This is done by using features such as internal reference and implicit conjunction to enable the writer to present a message to the reader that does not rely on the immediate context for its meaning.

A good example is provided by Hood (1990), in a situation where some people are busy cooking. The interactants say things like 'put this in now', and 'That's OK' where we only would know what 'this' and 'that' are if we were present. But a recipe, which is a written text that must stand up relatively independent of context has different language features. We would read in a recipe 'Beat egg whites until they hold firm peaks', with 'they' this time linking back to 'egg whites', within the text itself. Thus the written text is not so dependent on its immediate context.

Thus in this language model the basic unit is the text, a semantic unit which is produced and interpreted in contexts of use. Texts are instances of the language system, the product of choices made from the system, itself a key social and cultural resource for making and exchanging meaning. So the

task of the reader is to work with text and context, through the language system, to reconstruct and deconstruct possible meanings.

A model of reading: The systematic link between text and context is the basis for any reading model.

Reading is understood as reconstruction and deconstruction of meaning from text in context, drawing on the language system.

text ---------- meaning ---------- context

language system

Reader

Here meaning is found in the interaction (friction) between text and context. Readers intuitively use this relationship to construct meaning, drawing on their previous discursive history and their experience with other texts. They reconstruct the features of the context, especially the context the text itself sets up.

The reading process must be seen as a learned social practice in which readers, with their own subject position (their 'bank' of social and cultural experiences), faced with the text to be read, make assumptions about the context (situation type and genre), and interpret it with reference to the language system, thereby deriving possible meanings. The main strategy used by readers is prediction, the process by which they supply the missing elements in the text through presupposition. For a fuller discussion of this model see Winser (in press).

Where's the problem for the adult reader?

A language-based approach to reading therefore stresses that the reader will need to be helped to utilise all of these features of language: the text, the context and the language system. We can make a closer examination of adult readers' problems by focusing on what they do and do not know about language and reading. Here is an example of one reader's understanding of reading:

Bill: Through first and second grade I can remember memorising the books, I didn't read the stories, I would memorise them.

Interviewer: Did you know that wasn't really reading?

Bill: No.

Int: Or did you think that was what it was all about?

Bill: At the time, yes. (Johnston, 1985, 380, cited in Cormack, 1992).

This reader's perception of the task is so inadequate that we might assume that he lacks almost any understanding of the demands made on him in the task of reading.

The reading task may conveniently be understood by attending to what it is the reader must be able to do with reference to the various levels of text. First, at the level of the word, readers must be able to decode print and attack words as they appear in the text. An important element here is the reader's phonemic awareness, their understanding that the significant sounds of English (the phonemes) are related to the symbols that are represented in print. It is not normal for listeners to segment the sound stream that they hear in speech into separate words, so readers have to learn a new competence when they tackle print, where words are represented by symbols. Some beliefs about 'phonics' demonstrate a misunderstanding about reading and language. The relationship between sounds and print is a complex but systematic one in English; the underlying principle is that significant sounds (phonemes) are related to symbols (letters or letter groups) in the written language. There is a many to many relationship here, not a simple 1:1 link between 'sound' and letter. So one sound can be represented many ways (the 'ee' sound in 'feet', 'meat', 'believe' etc) and the same symbol can represent many sounds ('ou' differs in value in 'out', 'ought', 'enough' and 'camouflage'). It may be useful to check that the adult reader can:

- segment words into phonemes
- relate phonemes to letter names.

If there are problems here the reader is likely to benefit from some explicit support in developing their phonemic awareness. Then readers have to learn how to attack words directly, by using strategies like configurations of words, analysis of structures, similarity to known words, context clues,

alphabet patterns and by direct study of word meanings (for a fuller discussion, see McKay, 1981).

Next, at the sentence level, the grammatical issue becomes important, since sentences are constructed using grammatical principles. The reader must know that words get meaning from each other; in fact, it is probably best to think of a word as simply that part of the text that the reader happens to be focusing on at any given time. So it is the grammar, the system that enables words to work together in combinations, that is a key resource in the construction of meaning. Readers can be helped to understand how grammatical patterns work by using cloze activities, where the text deletions have been motivated by grammatical principles. Lexical items can be deleted in a factual text, to highlight technical terms in nominal groups (phrases), or elements that affect cohesion, such as conjunctions, can be focused on and discussed so as to clarify sentence combination principles. Another useful activity that develops grammatical awareness is the 'dictogloss' procedure (see Wajnryb, 1990).

Finally, at the whole text level, readers need help in understanding how meaning is constructed beyond the sentence level. First there is the purpose and schematic structure of the text, aspects that are dealt with in Martin's genre-based studies (Christie, 1989; Derewianka, 1990). Attention can be drawn to the social significance and value of the text, and to the way it is structured to achieve this purpose. Comparisons between different genres and their purpose and structure can be made, using a variety of texts, and readers can be encouraged to deconstruct texts by looking at ways genre can conceal ideologies (e.g. in the role of the male 'hero' figures in narrative). Factual texts can also be examined in this way, particularly the so-called 'objective' texts of science, which attempt to suppress human participants and social issues. Then there are the various textual elements that enable a text to build up its total message; particularly important here is the 'theme', the starting point of each clause, which predicts what is to come in the rest of the clause. As the themes are read across the whole text they point to the 'new' information which accumulates in the rest of the text.

Readers can be helped to comprehend at the whole text level by being encouraged to look at the big picture in a text and to check their

comprehension of it by examining the sequence of clause themes across the whole text. Other important whole text features include conjunctions and reference, both of which can be foregrounded by carefully constructed cloze activities.

The various levels of a text must, therefore, be carefully attended to in a reading lesson. There is an important bridging process involved here, i.e. the reader has to connect the meanings and if there is too great a gap between them they have difficulty with comprehension because they have difficulty in making inferences. This can be illustrated with an example of a poorly constructed text:

'Jane likes the smell of freshly cut grass. The grass was wet'.

The connection between these two sentences is made by repetition (a cohesive device) of the word 'grass' and by reference ('the'); however, in this text these connections are so weak that there is a good deal of ambiguity in the overall meaning. A reader must be able to use a shuttling technique, using the grammar as the basic resource, but also cohesive resources (reference, conjunction, lexical cohesion and theme). The shuttling must take place between the two levels of sentence and whole text so as to build up complete patterns of meaning.

There is some evidence that poorer readers do not use text structure effectively when they read (Maclean & Gold, 1986). There are studies where the story has been cut short or has had material deleted, and the poorer readers had difficulty in predicting the rest of the text from the basic structural patterns, while others show insensitivity to them when asked to recall stories read.

An underlying issue in this discussion is the question of metalinguistic awareness, the ability to access the grammar and schematic structure of a text and to make judgements about language itself in relation to that text. Such awareness is probably related to reading skill, although there is a need for caution about how these two factors in reading are related; is one a prerequisite for, or a product of, the other? It is more likely that there is an interaction between the two, with increasing awareness developing as a result of beginning to read and with increased reading competence developing more awareness. Certainly any formal reading situation, such as

the reading classroom, where there is a deliberate and concentrated focus on written texts, will increase awareness. In adults there is some evidence that suggests that metalinguistic awareness is late developing and is lacking in the less proficient, so some focus on language awareness seems appropriate in teaching reading to adults with reading problems (Winser, 1992).

Teaching reading to adults

Some principles for teaching reading to adults can be developed from the model outlined above. The reader must use:

- Prediction — a fundamental language skill, whatever the language mode. A reader constantly asks what's coming next? This strategy is especially important at the level of the sentence and the text.
- Inference — this strategy applies at the same two levels.
- Shuttling — the ability to move between the various levels of a text from broader elements, like its social purpose and ideology, to specific language elements, down to individual words.

All of these strategies are based on the reader's language knowledge and world knowledge, and both of these types of knowledge are needed for successful reading. It may be safe to assume that adults have acquired a quite strong knowledge of the world, but there will still be a need to check that they know the 'field' (subject matter) of the texts being read. It is also likely that problem readers lack language knowledge, and closely related here is their metalinguistc awareness.

The teacher must model and jointly construct meaning in texts for and with readers, by amplifying the context as support for the reader. This involves the development in the learning situation of a 'visible pedagogy' (Bernstein, 1990) whereby learners become aware of what is required of them in the achievement of the task of reading. These two activities, modelling and jointly constructing meaning, have been developed as part of the Disadvantaged Schools Project in the Sydney Metropolitan East Region of the NSW Dept of School Education. The Project has developed a curriculum genre for learning to write which incorporates reading as part of the cycle (DSP Language and Social Power Project, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1991).

• Modelling the text involves paying attention to the purpose, social importance and structures of the text, and can be done more or less explicitly. With adults it seems likely that teachers can direct readers' attention quite directly to textual features, as outlined above ('Where's the problem for the adult reader?'). There are also features of texts that are more apparent on the surface, such as title page, table of contents and index, glossary and pictures and diagrams. These also need to be modelled.

• Joint construction can take place where teacher and students read a text together ('shared reading'), with the teacher encouraging the class to join in with the reading in various ways. This can take the form of reading out aloud to the class and asking questions that require readers to predict or infer, of conducting an oral cloze (stopping and asking the students to suggest the next word), of asking one student to read a section and generally encouraging the class to contribute to the interpretation of the text in any way they can. However, the teacher takes up the conscious role of expert on the language of the text, and uses the opportunities raised by the specific features of the text being read, or by student questions or reactions to the text, to draw readers' attention to the way the language of the text is constructing meaning - again using the features outlined above in 'Where's the problem for the adult reader?' as a framework.

Teaching strategies: a summary

We can sum up the types of teaching strategy that may help adult problem readers.

• Cloze with discussion, focusing on chosen words (not random cloze) to be deleted for grammatical reasons:

- lexical (content words i.e. those specific to the field)
- function words (grammatical)

This activity will reveal readers' strategies and allows teacher modelling to take place. The following text is an example of a cloze that focuses on reference, which enables the text to cohere more effectively:

Tigers

Tigers belong to the cat family and are known as the big cats. Their scientific name is Panthera Tigris.

Tigers are striped, so _____ can hide and not be seen when _____ are hunting. _____ catch other animals by sneaking up on them and then pouncing. These large cats eat their food in big chunks. _____ don't chew it very much and one big meal may last them a few days.

Baby _____ are called cubs. The mother raised her three or four cubs in a den. _____ catches food for the cubs and teaches them how to hunt. The cubs play with each other and with their mother while _____ learn to hunt. After two years _____ hunt on their own.

Tigers are found in many parts of Asia. _____ live in jungles and swampy areas. Some even live in snowy, mountain country.

_____ are now threatened with extinction. Their numbers have diminished, largely due to modern hunting methods and high prices for tiger skins.

From: Assessing Writing: Scientific Reports (1990) Metropolitan East Disadvantaged Schools Program & NSW Dept. of School Education.

• Modelling (cf 'shared reading') — teacher centred activity drawing explicit attention to purpose, audience and text features, both structural and grammatical. Can be done with big books, newspapers and magazines.

• Joint construction — slowly shift responsibility onto the readers to use their field knowledge; encourage readers to comment on 'content', while the teacher comments on language features as directly as possible.

• Build on their field knowledge and if necessary build it up before and/or during reading. Develop their knowledge/concepts related to the field in general; relate unknown vocabulary to already known concepts (e.g. 'turn down the volume' for volume in the technical sense).

• Use the language experience approach (Stauffer, 1970) for real beginner readers or with very anxious readers. Focus on the students' interests and

encourage them to construct a personal recount based on their own experiences, scribing for them and then encouraging them by reading their own texts to them, and slowly get them accustomed to reading these texts back to you. Be aware of the limitations of this approach: the students' language will be 'spoken' and so it is necessary to move from this approach to one where you intervene gradually to help them understand how writing works, i.e. by modelling and jointly constructed reading.

To help adult readers with problems it is necessary to develop an approach to teaching them which is sensitive to language and which makes explicit reference to the way language works to make meaning in texts. A language-based approach requires teachers to become more aware of the relatively invisible language system that lies behind the text, as well as the social aspects of purpose and ideology that are always involved in making meaning through language. This approach suggests that teachers particularly, but also students, need to become more aware of the meaning making powers of language as the basis for developing better teaching strategies in the classroom and effective reading practices in the students.

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A full-time literacy program for long-term unemployed people. Integrating vocational content into a literacy program

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This session looked in detail at one example of a full time literacy program for long term unemployed people, run at Gateway College of TAFE, Brisbane. The program was implemented under the Newstart Preparation Course (CN899) which was specifically set up in Queensland to be offered at 1.1 and 2.1 level on the Interim Literacy Course Matrix for long term unemployed people. The course objectives relate to four core modules: Job Search Literacy, Basic Numeracy for Working, Skills for Working and Industrial Knowledge; and 3 elective modules: Personal Development, Career Knowledge and Computer Skills.

In the particular class to be described, all eight students were men who had experience within the building industry, as labourers and trades assistants. Ages ranged from 23 to 42. An integrated approach to the curriculum was taken, linking the course objectives across the theme of the building industry. While the objectives were primarily work related, personal literacy and numeracy needs were not neglected.

Integration occurred within the program in four ways:

Components of Literacy

Literacy was considered to incorporate four aspects, each of which provides an important part of the curriculum framework and strongly affects methods, assessment, classroom practice and evaluation. The four aspects of literacy are: grapho-phonic, cognition, language in use and social context. These relate closely to four types of literacy competence identified by Freebody and Luke (1990): coding, semantic, pragmatic and critical.

Content

Both vocational and personal needs for literacy were included. Topics drew mainly from fields of maths, science, occupational health and safety,

material handling, cooking, industrial relations and workplace practices. As well as ensuring that concepts and skills were integrated into tasks, some skills were taught at separate times, eg multiplication and spelling.

Method

Methods varied depending on the literacy tasks, the purpose of the literacy act and the student's developing skills and knowledge. Table 1 shows some strategies used to develop each aspect of literacy. Various combinations of groupings were used—the whole group, pairs, threes, individuals.

Skills

The course was targeted at the lower levels of literacy (1.1 and 2.1). Vocational content was integrated into the literacy program. This allowed the development of vocabulary, familiarity with types of text and concepts which will be useful later in vocational courses at the 3.2 and 4.2 level on the ILCM. As students move up the ILCM, the balance between reading to learn and learning to read gradually alters, until the emphasis becomes integrating literacy into the vocational area.

The students in this course realised that there were very few jobs for people without skills so were happy to be offered a pathway to vocational training. The course was therefore preparing them for a Vocational Bridging Course consisting of four of the broad based National Metal Engineering Modules.

All four aspects of literacy were incorporated into the course. In addition, theories of (adult) learning led to the inclusion of the following strategies: relevance, purpose, association—ways of remembering, allowing for practice and transfer, relating to oneself.

Organisation of Program—Developmental Plan

The concept of top level structure (Meyer, 1983) was used to organise the program in an increasing level of difficulty using a range of text types and structures and to provide multiple purposes for every task. Tasks were not given on their own merit, or to keep people busy, but because they would lead to increasing development of a range of skills and understanding about reading, writing, thinking, language and the reader/writer.

This article cannot provide a full description and rationale for the activities conducted in the class. From the beginning, the students were the Board of Directors of a firm, the "Hot Kit Construction Company". They designed the application form, decided who to employ, the role specifications and qualities of the personnel. Their power and self-esteem were immediately changed. One of the most exciting events was the use of a workplace simulation which developed from week four and is described below in detail.

A Simulation

The students developed together a fictitious accident using key words: who, where, when, what, why and then individually wrote up the report in a paragraph. They then met together as a Self Management Group (SMG) for a meeting the day after the accident. Books were shifted from desks and the furniture was rearranged to be a board room. A Chairperson and Minute-taker were appointed. I took a seat around the table avoiding a position as Head. The "Hot Kit Construction Company" was in session.

One member of the SMG read his accident report and this became the version used for the meeting. In essence, a fork lift driver had run over a gas line and caused an explosion. The fork lift driver and another worker were killed. One worker was seriously injured and there was extensive damage to the site. I attempted to take a back seat role of coaching rather than leading—coaching in group management, meeting procedure and occasionally prompting to move along the simulation. Each SMG member took on a role on the construction site—Company Director, site inspector, leading hand, fitter and turner, storeperson, factory manager, accountant. The group developed an agenda which was a list of jobs for members to do before the next meeting. The role determined a piece of writing required as follows:

Company Director: Letter of condolence to family of deceased worker; letter to client explaining delay in construction.

Accountant: Minute of meeting, letter to the insurance company.

Fitter and turner: Eye-witness account of accident.

Site manager: Report on events before and after.

Storeperson: New stores required.

Leading Hand: Eye-witness account.

Foreman: Personnel report.

Boilermaker: Damage report.

A new member joined the next day and became the Workplace Safety Officer. A Union Representative also was added (another part-time teacher) and sent a letter to the Director requesting an explanation for holding a meeting without a union delegate present.

The result was a collection of letters, lists and reports. The agenda of the second meeting was the reading of reports and discussion of further action. A visit from the Government Safety Officer (the third part-time teacher) was pending. The Company was anxious to get its own story right. A complication had arisen. There was a suggestion that the forklift driver had been drinking so a letter had to be sent to the Coroner for a report. The wife of the deceased wrote back saying the settlement was insufficient and demanded a higher payout. Someone realised that the injured workers needed letters as well. An intense battle developed. The Workplace Health and Safety Officer and the Union delegate had evidence to show that the forklift had been labelled as faulty. Previous reports to the Factory Manager outlining the faults were produced. The managers were intent on proving negligence of the driver through alcohol, of the Gas Company's fault for inadequately protecting the gas line. The Coroner's report found traces of alcohol but there was insufficient evidence to show it was above the legal limits; reports came in from the Gas Company and the Fire Chief .... and so it went on. The accountant was given the damages report.

The SMG members soon learnt that attending meetings means you get jobs! By the third meeting the teacher was mere decoration, occasionally reminding the chairperson of their position. Attention was steered away from finding out who to blame, towards making plans for improving productivity to meet deadlines.

The result: heaps of writing with a purpose. It was still a fabrication and everyone knew we were playing games, but there was such vitality, intrigue and intensity, and power. Some members had to look at legislation, forms,

pamphlets and telephone books to get information they needed. The meetings generated usage of oral language with words, ideas, suggestions and arguments that most of them had never tried to articulate before. In fact, some of them were quite amazed when they heard themselves trying to get their tongues around words. Fortunately, their previous experiences and general world knowledge helped enormously. Times in the computer room were spent composing and editing their work, with a reason—to have it good enough for others to read. The communication skills of group participation, teamwork and problem solving were all practised. Apart from the friendly rivalry that developed, the process created incredibly strong cohesion within the group. As for skills—oral reading happened naturally in presenting reports and improved dramatically with a great deal of support from each other. The students would assist the oral reader and found that when it wasn't their turn, their reading was much better. This provided an opportunity to discuss what was happening when they were reading and metacognitive strategies that could be used to help fluency, accuracy and comprehension. Students tackled texts they would normally not have tried because it was for a particular purpose to gather information and not just to read for its own sake.

The SMG meetings and related themes integrated maths (costs of damage, area devastated), literacy, industrial relations, occupational health and safety, quality concepts, material handling (forklifts, storing hazardous materials), knowledge of current workplace practices. Appendix 1 summarises numerous other tasks and skills that were used during the course within a framework of teaching top level structure, keeping in mind the required vocabulary concepts and types of texts required for the future vocational courses. These activities could be substituted with topics suited to interests and needs of any group.

Conclusion

Integrating vocational content into literacy programs is extremely exciting and rewarding, using a lot of experience the students already have. The students can choose an industry and set up their own company, deciding on the qualities and roles of their staff. Power relationships are suddenly reversed as students design the application form and interview.

Possibilities for simulations using workplace committees are endless eg a rival company has just invented a new product that will make your company's main product obsolete...; your company's main machine has just been declared unsafe by inspectors...

Ten weeks is very short and the gains that the students make are monumental. There is no time to waste so every single task that is given needs to be carefully evaluated. Following directions to make a real item, is better than doing a comprehension exercise on a set of instructions. Using the dictionary to find out the meaning and pronunciation of words on the Workers Compensation pamphlet, and discussing layout and purpose of pamphlets, use of logos, pictures and tables, is better than doing a page of dictionary exercises. Of course, there are times when subskills lessons eg spelling, are important and these must then be repeatedly related to other tasks. So next time you see a great idea in a workbook, don't reach for the photocopier. Think of a way of creating the event and making literacy and numeracy tasks happen.

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Appendix 1

The five structures are introduced in order of complexity.

1. Lists/Descriptions

Features: Lists are often simple because they are personal, concrete, contextualised and familiar. Sometimes you can tell it is a list because it is one under the other (format). Sometimes it is separated by commas. Case

studies are included in this category and students are encouraged to recognise a case study as an example which will help them understand and relate to the ideas of the author.

Value: Develops concept of categorisation (grouping) and generalisation.

Examples: Class roll, names, suburbs, town (post codes) in phone book, street directory, atlas, encyclopedia, gazeteer, classified ads—house, employment, employees required for industry, characteristics of workers, descriptions—list of features, index of newspaper, book, weather, catalogue of tools, invoices, orders, buildings or sections on a worksite, duty statement, parts of a machine, tasks to prepare a field trip, everything I know about a topic (mindmapping).

2. Comparison

Features: Key Words eg as....as, faster, greatest, than, more, but, alternatively. Tables, graphs can facilitate comparison.

Value: We use comparisons to help remember things and relate something new to something we already know. Retrieval charts based on comparison of properties are very useful for study.

Examples: Aluminium—features (properties)—why is it useful? People or places descriptions, industrial processes, points of view on the same item, ratio, models of machines, advantages/disadvantages, employee's/ employer's responsibilities, Choice magazine, advertisements (printed or TV) often have an implied comparison, Workplace change—before and after.

3. Sequence

Features: Sometimes these are shown by numbers. There is an order. Key Words: first, second, then, after, before, now.

Value: A clear sequence helps us follow directions and instructions.

Examples: Electrolysis (2 nails, battery, salt water), industrial process, flow chart, plan, resuscitation (ABC of First Aid), history (eg of workplace or self), simplest to hardest, schedule, diary, calendar, timetable, itinerary, size, production quantity, graph, directions, instructions, procedures, recipe, workplace incident report, meeting notes, story, account.

4. Cause and effect

Features: Key Words: If..then.., so, because, therefore, consequently, leads to. In notetaking use arrow, =, therefore and because symbols.

Value: The concept of consequence is extremely important in understanding and coping with events.

Examples: Result of workplace accident, warning signs, maths examples, identifying causes for product failure, health and safety—responsibility, plan for safe and cheap handling of materials, rules and regulations, nutrition, industrial processes, chemical reactions, people's behaviour eg assertiveness techniques, and actual burglary and theft—effects.

5. Problem/Solution

Features: It could require: being able to identify and state the problem given some symptoms; gathering data; rejecting data; evaluating solutions. It may use lists, comparisons, sequences, cause and effect. It could start with a case study as an example. This format is frequently used in the Readers Digest and is very readable.

Value: The skills and processes of problem solving are now highly needed at all levels in the workplace.

Examples: Case studies from "Hazards at Work", industrial relations case studies, quality issues—fixing up processes, issues—profit, pollution, classroom.

The right to literacy—The rhetoric, The romance, The reality, from policy to practice—an industry/service-provider perspective: literacy and English language—social justice or economic imperative?

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Introduction

Anne Learmonth and I decided to present this joint paper because we have had a challenging and sometimes fraught couple of years developing and implementing the Literacy, English language and Numeracy program in the SEC. We struggled with concepts and directions that certainly presented us with new challenges professionally, and also presented challenges within the organisational context in which we work.

The outline of our session is:

- SECV Policy Framework for Literacy and English language
- 1991/92 Program:

— SECV perspective—what was the aim and process?

— WBE perspective—how the program differs from normal process; involvement and negotiation with AMES; issues raised such as confidentiality.

- 1992/93 Program—what is happening now?
- Analysis—Social Justice or Economic Efficiency?

— SECV perspective

— WBE perspective

SECV Policy and Framework (Wendy Heath)

The SECV began its literacy program in 1988 in the Latrobe Valley involving the Council for Adult Education (WBE). It conducted a small number of classes in one of the power stations, but the program ceased because management and unions could not agree on training conditions, that is, overtime payments, staffing replacements, etc.

The program recommenced in 1990 in one of the worksites in the Production Group, Latrobe Valley. Although this is decreasingly so, a significant proportion of work in the Valley did not require a complex range of skills, for instance, boiler cleaners whose work is of a heavy manual nature and involves climbing into hot boilers and cleaning from the boiler walls.

An English language and Literacy audit was undertaken in a Production Group Division. The summary results of that audit of 180 employees were:

- 11% of workers could not relay, or needed assistance in relaying, the meaning of safety signs;
- 17% could not read, or needed assistance in relaying the meaning of a piece of prose related to work-related materials;
- 11% had considerable difficulty with understanding the meaning of a simple instruction;
- 30% had some difficulty in the writing requirements of simple tasks; and
- 10% of the non-English speaking background workers had difficulty in communicating and understanding English.

Whilst hypothesising that these low levels of literacy and English language were not universal due to the nature of jobs across the organisation, the SECV management agreed that this audit did suggest an issue which had to be confronted.

At the same time, the SECV, like all enterprises, was undergoing (and indeed still is undergoing) major restructuring and reform. It was subject to award restructuring and skill-based pay systems which clearly would have significant impact on all employees. Pay increases were linked with training and skill acquisition; it was clear that employees who have low levels of literacy and/or English language were going to be unfairly disadvantaged in this system.

The SECV took the position at the time that it was not concerned to ascertain the degree of the 'problem' of low level literacy amongst employees and then determine a training agenda to address that problem. Instead, it began with the premise that:

"The SECV recognises that, amongst its workforce, there are employees who have difficulties with literacy and English-language. It accepts that, for efficiency, productivity and equity reasons, the workforce must have basic literacy and English-language skills which will enable all employees to gain new and more complex skills. The acquisition of these skills will contribute both to their job satisfaction and earning potential, and to the productivity of the industry."

The following policy framework was determined:

- reading, writing, speaking and listening are skills which should be recognised in the same way as any other skills. Employees should be paid for acquiring these skills.

- all current employees who do not have the basic skills, or the necessary literacy/English-language skills relevant to the task, should have access to training in work time.

- a competency-based approach should be taken to identify skills above the very basic health and safety requirements.

- curriculum will continue to be based on workplace and broader community requirements for literacy and English-language skills.

From the perspective of the SECV, the issues which created the most difficulty in implementation, both within the organisation and externally, were those related to skills extension and the identified skill and competency levels. This point will be elaborated later in the paper.

It is also mentioned in passing that this training component of the program is only one aspect of the total approach in the SECV. The need to focus on communication throughout the organisation has been recognised, including senior management level. The SECV is also in the very early stages of looking at Open Learning approaches, including Computer-Assisted Learning.

1991/92 SECV PROGRAM

A. SECV Perspective (Wendy Heath)

The most contentious aspect of the program in 1991/92—and to some degree it remains although far less so today—was the determination to identify a basic competency level for all employees. Placing these skills on the skills glossary and therefore providing employees with the opportunity to gain a pay increase for their acquisition was contentious in implementation more so than in theory.

In 1991/92, the following occurred:

1. If it was agreed that literacy and English language were to be recognised as skills and, therefore, employees would receive pay increases for their acquisition, then a basic level of competency for each component had to be determined.

2. After considerable consultation with educationalists and service-providers (and to a lesser degree other workplaces) to identify what that competency level should be, the SECV decided to accept the descriptors in the ALAN Scales and the ASLPR Scale.

That is, it agreed that its overall objective was that all employees should possess, or have the opportunity to possess, the basic literacy and English language competency levels which equate with Level 2 of the ASPLR and Level D of the ALAN Scale.

3. The SECV received advice from educationalists that:

- ALAN D and ASPLR 2 broadly equate;

- achieving these levels of competency will assist employees in developing independence, accuracy and confidence in communicating in the workplace; and
- these skill and competency levels are transferable.

4. Far more emphasis and expectation was placed on service-providers with regard to assessment and curriculum than in our previous classes.

The following points are made with regard to the use of the ALAN Scales.

1. At the time, there were no other descriptors for literacy that could be readily adapted for the SECV purposes and we had no difficulty in adapting them for those purposes.

2. The descriptors were used to analyse tasks and materials, not people. That is, in the 1991/92 program we attempted to identify the basic literacy and English language tasks and functions in our pilot worksites which were then analysed against ALAN and ASLPR. Those tasks and skills which were assessed as below the required levels were incorporated into the assessment and curriculum.

3. Employees, on a voluntary basis, were then assessed against criteria with regard to their ability to reach the required competency levels within a certain number of training hours.

One of the most difficult issues for all concerned in the 1991/92 program was that of assessment and training expectations. The policy recognises that 'some employees will increase their communication skills through training, but will not be able to achieve the competency level standards. These employees must not be placed under pressure to achieve standards that are beyond a realistic level for them.'

However, the reality was that, because it was a pilot program, we made some mistakes and some employees were placed in classes where it was expected that they would achieve the basic competency levels and quite clearly they could not and would not. This was particularly so for older employees from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Whilst we were able to adapt the assessment and training content, it did place pressure on some employees and the service-providers concerned.

This issue brought the equity and efficiency debate starkly to the fore. These dilemmas were addressed through negotiation with the worksite and the service-providers, particularly AMES.

The SECV decided to have an independent evaluation of the pilot program undertaken by the Australian Centre for Best Practice (previously Workplace Reform Centre). The review confirmed our impressions that the program was basically sound, but that improvements needed to occur with regard to workplace participation and the identification of competency levels. The major conclusions can be found in Appendix A.

B. Workplace Basic Education Perspective (Anne Learmonth)

In 1990, Wendy Heath, then Manager, Equal Employment Opportunity contacted the Workplace Basic Education Program (WBEP) and asked that it become involved in the development and testing of its draft Literacy and English language policy. The role and function of the WBEP is described in Appendix B.

It is worth stating here what WBEP's initial understanding of the proposal was and what we believed the consequences might be for established principles and processes:

- The SEC believed that it should identify a level of language and literacy proficiency that all employees should possess.
- They believed that some present employees might not be at the level and that the policy should be explicit about the right of those employees to receive training to bring them to the defined level.
- The training would be recognised as part of the SEC's skills extension program and successful students would receive pay increments.
- Pre- and post-class assessment would be based on agreed competency levels.
- WBEP would be asked, together with AMES, to assess students and to report results to management.

• Students who did not wish to have the training recognised for skills extension could also participate.

General issues raised were:

• Is it possible and useful for an organisation to try to establish a corporate policy on language and literacy proficiency?

• Are the requirements the same across a large and varied organisation?

• How should a level be set and what level is appropriate?

• What about workers who may never reach the level but who have other skills valuable to the organisation?

The questions raised for WBEP as a provider included—

• What does volunteering mean when a pay rise is involved?

• How could we abide by principles of confidentiality where we were required to report on the assessment of students in terms of competency levels? Were we disadvantaging students if we did not breach confidentiality?

• Should we redesign our basic interview format to include tasks related to specific workplace material? If so, how?

• Should we design courses that were only based on specific workplace material and not on the individual needs of students?

• If we included both, what were the correct proportions?

• How could we assess competency in literacy and language?

• What might be the implications of having students in the same class for two different reasons? Would there need to be two curriculums?

Concern was expressed by some WBEP staff that this proposal appeared to be taking them into areas in which they had little or no prior experience and where a perceived dichotomy between training and education could lead to friction and to demands for unacceptable levels of compromise. On the other hand, the SEC had clearly indicated its intention to work through tripartite committees, and willingness to fully discuss our concerns and to use our experience to the full.

It was agreed that WBEP should continue to negotiate with the SEC, that concerns should be clearly expressed and that progress should be monitored carefully. The WBEP team accepted that participation in this project would provide valuable information about how their principles and practices could respond to new challenges and pressures and what, if any, changes would be required.

The SEC was the first workplace we knew that was considering the inclusion of a literacy and English language policy in its corporate policy. It was the first in which WBEP was being asked to become involved in a competency-based skills recognition process. It was also the first in which an 'extra-layer' of assessment was required and in which WBEP staff would be involved in working closely with AMES from the beginning of the project.

It was clear that working with the SEC would be very different from the normal fieldwork and class provision process. WBEP staff believed that experience gained through this project would have relevance to a number of other industries.

Two years of working together has demonstrated that some of the WBEP's fears were unfounded and that agreement between parties with different views can be reached by negotiation. Working through a tripartite structure at both corporate and worksite levels has been an essential part of this process.

1993/94 SECV Program (Wendy Heath)

A number of critical factors were raised for the SEC with the 1992/93 program. Numeracy has to be addressed and local worksites need to be involved more rigorously in providing and making decisions about material for assessment and curriculum.

Whilst the 1991/92 program involved close consultation with the worksite Consultative Committees, and all material used for assessment and curriculum came from the local worksite (other than the 'community literacy' curriculum), we believe we still missed the mark on making it relevant to employees and supervisors back on the shop-floor. The Australian Centre's evaluation reported that most supervisors could not

describe change in their employees after the training, although all agreed that the training was most worthwhile with regard to improved morale.

For 1992/93, we have a significant grant from the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Canberra to achieve the following objectives:

- To establish an approach to assess the appropriateness of Level D of the ALAN Scale and Level 2 of the ASLPR to meeting the organisation's overall objectives in literacy and English language, and to determine basic competency levels based on that assessment.

- To identify enterprise-wide numeracy tasks, evaluate those tasks in the context of the ALAN descriptors and locate appropriate basic numeracy competencies within the SECV.

- To implement and evaluate the efficacy of the assessment procedures and training modules in bringing employees to the basic competency levels.

- To establish the processes and mechanisms that will further facilitate the incorporation of Literacy, English language and Numeracy issues into the broader restructuring process.

In plain English, what this means is that we are identifying key semi-skilled and skilled jobs within certain worksites in the organisation, developing task and skill profiles, and then identifying the Literacy, English language and Numeracy skills and competencies inherent in these tasks. What we are concentrating on is ensuring that these skills and competencies are not marginalised in the context of our workplace. They are fundamental to employees doing their current and future jobs efficiently and effectively and, therefore, fundamental to enterprise productivity.

This approach is probably not unique to anyone involved in current literacy and language provision. What is slightly different, I think, is the fact that we are attempting to determine enterprise-wide competency standards or, at the very least, competency standards that are appropriate across our three major Strategic Business Units—Customer Services, Production and Power Grid. And what is also slightly different is that we are undertaking very real consultation and participation in having those skills and competency levels identified by those who do the jobs.

I will make some brief points about how we intend to achieve these objectives.

1. The tripartite Consultative Committee and the Job Advisory Committee at the workplace level are much more specifically involved in setting the agenda than our pilot program.

2. At each selected worksite (we have selected 8—10 across the Commission), these committees do, or will:

a. identify the key jobs to be selected;
b. identify the broad tasks and skills each job entails, including the literacy, English language and numeracy tasks and skills;
c. set the proposed competency levels;
d. make recommendations to management if the competency levels are higher or lower than those currently determined by corporate policy;
e. contribute to the assessment criteria;
f. comment on the proposed curriculum; and
g. make recommendations to management about a broader training agenda.

3. The skill headings we are identifying go far beyond a narrow job definition. For example, in one worksite, the skill headings identified and, therefore, the direction for curriculum and training are:

* Administration
* Occupational Health and Safety
* Industrial Relations/Organisation Procedures
* Job Planning/Co-ordination
* Material Supply
* Quality
* Problem Solving
* Access Resource Information
* Read Technical Drawings
* Precision Measurement
* Teamwork

(This worksite did not include a numeracy analysis)

4. The SECV has made two bottom-line commitments to training:

1. Basic Health and Safety and Communication Programs

These programs, which are fully funded by the SECV, are designed for those employees with very low level literacy and English language skills, for example, those employees who are unable to read and comprehend the health and safety signs.

2. Competency-Based Training

We have funding from DEET to run one competency-based class in 10 worksites. We don't know how many more classes we will be required to run in each of these 10 worksites, but commitment has been made by local management to ensure all employees have the opportunity to achieve the competency levels. The objective is to take the model across all other worksites after evaluation in 1993.

We will also be undertaking further analysis to see how the competencies correlate with the Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework when that project is ready.

Social Justice or Economic Efficiency?

A. Perspective: Wendy Heath

I would assert that the Literacy, English language and Numeracy program as being implemented in the SECV meets both social justice and economic efficiency principles.

That is, if you define social justice as:

the right of people to have the opportunity to achieve levels of literacy, English language and numeracy which will enable them:

* to feel more confident and competent in doing their current job
* to become independent learners
* to understand what changes are taking place in the workplace and broader community which will impact on their daily lives
* to participate in decision-making at all levels, eg enterprise bargaining, or at least understand those decision-making processes
* to participate in training
* to access new technologies

* to participate in safe work environments—to understand health and safety rules and procedures.

And if you define economic efficiency as achieving the best possible outcome, in financial terms, by ensuring the best possible use of all resources, then it must be understood that you cannot achieve economic efficiency without social justice. That is, if people within the organisation are not able to contribute to the best of their ability, the organisation cannot possibly achieve optimal economic efficiency.

As has been asserted many times over the past decade, I would agree with those who claim that the delineation between social justice and economic efficiency is false from many perspectives and, in this context, where initiatives such as literacy, English language and numeracy programs in the workplace are concerned.

This position is not universally held within the SECV. It certainly is held within the union movement, but its understanding and acceptance amongst the total SECV workforce is still evolving (we do have 14,500 personnel!). But it is there and with respect to some areas it is quite a widespread view. Indeed, some of the SECV Managers are the strongest advocates for the program, particularly because of its positive impact on people.

In our view, integrating literacy, English language and numeracy into a competency based approach will enhance this understanding and acceptance.

B. Perspective: Anne Learmonth

Opinion is still divided about the value of developing a corporate policy on English language, literacy and numeracy. It is expected that the current projects will indicate whether there is a common core of skill required across the whole organisation. The SEC believes it is necessary and the existence of such a policy has certainly made negotiations easier at some worksites and brought the issue to the attention of many managers.

Access to language and literacy training has increased as a result of the project and the benefits to workers are becoming obvious. Additional worksites are now recognising the need to participate. Fears are still expressed about the potential for misuse of information regarding a

worker's literacy or language skill levels, but there has been no sign of misuse in any way.

Integration into the skills acquisition program appears to be proceeding smoothly. However, many employees are at the top of their Band and can move no higher at present. The benefits for them are personal and not monetary, but most are happy to participate on that basis.

An interview format, to be used by both AMES and WBEP, has been developed from their normal formats. It includes a variety of tasks assessing understanding of selected workplace material. Following briefing sessions, trained interviewers will trial the interview format.

The Consultative Committee is concerned to ensure that the information gained from these interviews is only used for class placement and for developing appropriate curriculum material.

The meaning of volunteer, in an environment where pay increments or access to further training or career path opportunities are dependent on participation in basic training, remains a vexed issue. At the SEC, the emphasis has been on explaining the benefits fully, not making promises that cannot be kept and encouraging, rather than coercing, involvement.

In the initial project, the balance between students' needs and workplace needs was agreed as 50% individual needs, 25% enterprise-wide material and 25% worksite specific material. This will be reviewed for classes in the second project, but there is agreement that the class curriculum should not be solely based on workplace material.

To date, there have been no problems arising from having students in a class for different reasons and that same curriculum has been used for everyone in a class.

I agree with Wendy Heath's contention that good social justice practices are also economically efficient, but believe that everyone involved in workplace basic education, both employers and service-providers, have to keep on pointing this out to the 'economic rationalist'. Changes in Government policy may impact on both the SEC and WBEP in ways that effect the project, but we believe that the processes that have been set in place will assist us to solve these problems as they come.

Down-sizing, redeployment, retrenchment, job redesign, enterprise bargaining and all the other industry change activities now going on have major, and usually negative, effects on workers with low levels of English language and numeracy. Putting in place a policy that provides access to training in these areas as a right of all employees may prove to be the best way of ensuring their survival in difficult economic times, by making sure that they have the skills that are valuable to their employer.

We believe that the processes developed by the SEC can offer other workplaces and providers a useful model that can be adapted to meet different needs.

APPENDIX A

A. Benefits of the Program

- Significant improvement in morale/industrial relations environment
- Widespread support among participants
- Recognition of the relevance of literacy and English language skills across all levels of the organisation.
- Enhancement of skills relevant to both the workplace and broader life experience

B. Challenges for the Program

- Integrate the program into broader priorities of the worksite
- Promote understanding and commitment to the program from all levels of the organisation
- Ensure that use of external scales, training content and assessment procedures are relevant to the organisation's skill requirements
- Implement a flexible program that can adapt to the changing profile and needs of the organisation

APPENDIX B

Brief Outline of the Workplace Basic Education Project

Principles

- WBE operates only where both union and management support exists
- a tripartite Planning Group is set up to —

arrange advertising about the program and inform the workplace

receive and discuss surveys of need

prioritise possible classes

arrange day, time and venue for classes

negotiate time release

provide information on specific workplace needs

determine broad curriculum areas

monitor and evaluate class outcomes

resolve problems or disputes

- classes are held in negotiated work time
- classes are openly advertised and all students are volunteers
- confidentiality is respected both for interviews and class activities
- evaluation is against an agreed set of outcomes
- educational need is the principal consideration for inclusion in a class

WBE grew out of the Access Department at the Council of Adult Education and its staff come from an adult literacy and basic education background, with a strong commitment to that field's models of good practice. Curriculum has typically been developed for a specific class with an emphasis on maintaining a balance between meeting the particular learning needs of each individual student and the use of specific workplace material.

Strategic management in language and literacy:outcomes or empires?

Nicole Gilding
Department of Education and TAFE, South Australia

In speaking to you today I will draw upon three sources of experience:

- my bureaucratic experience in DETAFE in policy and management of access and equity programs including adult literacy
- my recent experiences as an ACAL executive member
- my reflections upon, and processes of, ILY national projects and their implications.

I want to explore with you some of the tensions in the adult literacy (and ESL language) field/s and some of the complexities facing managers at both State and institutional level. In so doing, I want to pose more questions than proffer solutions and, because I am anxious to promote discussion about these perceptions and concerns, (at least to see whether they strike any resonance with you; whether you share them or see it quite differently), I will be somewhat less subtle and certainly briefer than I believe the issues deserve, and which a more academic presentation would allow.

In order to crystalise the issues I would like to review the past. So much has happened since 1990 that it is hard to remember what it was like; what we thought was 'normal'. I go back to statements I made at an ACAL conference in 1986 for my point of reference.

I described adult literacy provision as being 'do-goodish': poorly linked to the policy developments in equal opportunity, I found that it had poorly developed mechanisms for accountability; it was unsophisticated in matters of formal curriculum development; there was little attention to evaluation, a reliance upon anecdote rather than data. Altogether, it needed to face the issues:

- becoming clear about its goals and priorities
- becoming bureaucratically more sophisticated
- becoming more rigorous and accountable

- becoming more engaged in system change rather than, or in addition to, simply teaching students, and thus become more powerful.

I wanted adult literacy to become more self-managed as a field of endeavour, but at the same time I set out to manage it. It proved difficult to manage. The reasons for this include:

- a lack of funding available to infrastructure so that higher level management and specialist skills were underdeveloped, e.g., particularly professional development or curriculum development

- marginalisation of the adult literacy program (and relative isolation of the DILGEA funded AMES) meant that those in the program had marginal attachment to, and little trust in, bureaucratic processes, nor was there familiarity with the most basic of strategic process—planning and budgeting. Virtually no one ever moved out of the literacy field or AMES (which is within TAFE in South Australia) to take up senior positions and to take their knowledge to their new tasks and to influence a different echelon in the organisation

- a precarious past (few permanent officers, and consequently little status in hierarchical terms and a reliance on hourly paid staff who could be sacked when funds dried up) meant that few people had a longer term view—there was no vision of what could be—but a preoccupation with survival.

All these were indicators of a powerless group.

Well, a lot has changed since 1986, and even more since 1990. For a start, instead of talking about what you should do, I am now talking about the problems that confront us.

We are now talking about a program which has a high political priority, a greatly increased resource base, a multitude of projects and activities, which has experienced rapid growth and where there are now some real possibilities of reaching a much greater number of those in need of literacy services than ever before.

There is more evaluation and scrutiny than ever before—some of it inappropriate but all of it experience upon which to reflect. There are more permanent officers and a lot more teachers.

I am reminded of that line: "if everything's so good why am I feeling so bad?" Why do I feel that we've ended up somewhere not quite where we wished?

I think it is because:

- we are a powerless group
- we have grown in size but remain at the margins and not in the mainstream; the mainstream has shifted
- we are a field that is still reactive, having things done to it even while we work very hard at shaping the agenda
- we work hard at project, at policy and strategy, but somehow are not players at the national level in having significant influence in making decisions.

Why is this so?

What processes of change are affecting us?

I was reflecting on this with regard to the ebb and flow in the fortunes of SACAL. When I began work in adult literacy I spent half my time responding to ministerials generated by SACAL which was jumping up and down about funding cuts. I regarded these as an irritant. This was made more so because all of SACAL was made up of TAFE literacy lecturers. I then set about 'managing' adult literacy. There has virtually been no ministerials in the last three years; SACAL is examining its role, the program continues to grow.

What happened was that I 'stole' SACAL's agenda and from my bureaucratic position was able to 'do' what SACAL could only advocate. I could—through policy, funding, personnel and networking processes—always stay in advance of SACAL.

I think something similar has happened to ACAL post ILY, and I think all senior managers in adult literacy and languages services in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Northern Territory, Tasmania and Western Australia feel that to some extent it has happened in our relations with the Commonwealth during 1991 and 1992.

We talk about collaboration and cooperation but the tensions between ACAL and the Commonwealth and between the Commonwealth and the States are palpable and destructive of the hopes many of us had in International Literacy Year.

Those of us involved in the development of a national strategic framework for adult literacy and English language under the auspices of AEC/ MOVEET, continue to work with goodwill and concern about the task of envisaging and managing the sort of literacy and language provision we believe is necessary and appropriate, (for appropriate read efficient, effective, equitable), but we do so with a sense of constant amazement at the incongruities between the sorts of principles for effective management of change with which I am familiar, and the high-handed and pre-emptive approaches taken by the so-called partner to the States.

All this is occurring in the climate which has recently seen the painful process of negotiation to form ANTA and acceptance of joint planning as the central approach to be taken in national policy development and implementation.

I want to look behind the behaviour however; because what it implies to me is that there is no common vision held by the key States and Commonwealth officers who manage literacy and language provision; it is commonly held beliefs and understandings which allow us to work together on, and through, change.

Traditionally, managers of literacy and language have been drawn from the field or from related fields. Now, for perhaps the first time at national and state level, policy and programs are driven by bureaucrats who are not educators; (that's about as mainstreamed as you can get.) Listen to the language: we are still talking about learning and curriculum and outcomes (ours is an educational debate) while their's is a debate about the management of resources in a political context.

These are not necessarily in conflict—in fact the best policy decisions and management practices will flow from a combination of these skills and perspectives. But if we lose sight of the fact that it is an educational enterprise—not the manufacture of books or refrigerators—then we will have lost much of our capacity to influence the grass roots.

It seems to me that what has happened is that the Commonwealth, having been effectively influenced by officers committed to some vision of adult literacy which was shared by States' representatives and which was profoundly influenced by ACAL, has in fact run away with the agenda and the money, leaving us all feeling relatively powerless, and certainly not trusting. Partly this is because programs are being run by people without a history and without an educational perspective—more attuned to control than facilitation and not supported by professional opportunities to engage with the fields they seek to control.

The Commonwealth DEET has to some degree also distanced itself from ACAL on which it once depended for knowledge, vision, networks and strategies. The interlude of ILY is definitely over.

The growth of the language and literacy fields in Commonwealth terms has outstripped the knowledge and experience of those managing it and, to some extent, this has happened also in states which have experienced rapid expansion. The advantage state systems have in coping with this rapidity of change is that they still have direct connections to the field and that fund of educational thinking on which to draw and which provides a constant critique of their plans and actions. The Commonwealth officers coping with their avalanche of work and pressure do not have the same access to advice or support. They also work in a climate in which there is long-standing distrust of states and state officers—connections between us are fraught on both sides with the possibility of being criticised for fraternising with the enemy. The pressures of work are great both in volume and complexity—most people are struggling.

I am reminded of the furore which erupted at an Australian Women in Education Coalition conference in Melbourne in the late eighties when Denise Bradely (then Women's Adviser in Education in SA, now Deputy Vice Chancellor at the University of South Australia) remarked that as women who had moved rapidly into senior positions in alien bureaucracies and with lots of talent but little experience we were all operating "at the margins of our competence".

I think any field that grows rapidly will experience this, and a field that has been so starved of resources, had little attention, few promotion positions,

no political exposure and a client orientation, rather than a system orientation, is particularly vulnerable.

There is a sense of critical mass in management infrastructure—have this mass (the right mixture of talent, positions, structures and resources) and you can manage a vast empire but without it it is a struggle to survive and to stay on top of the roller coaster. Without these resources we cannot even describe the outcomes of what we currently do let alone evaluate and refine provision to do more precise and different things; to engage with the sort of thinking offered by Brian Street and Allan Luke and make problematic the assumptions and paradigms within which we operate.

When you also regard the sources of advice and support that helped get the roller coaster underway as vested interests, or irritants to your bureaucratic process, then the way is open for some significant problems to emerge as growth is actively pursued. At the very least, every system of provision now needs to create some positions in professional development, curriculum development and in policy in order to digest and comment thoughtfully upon what is emerging from the ALLP and Commonwealth initiatives, let alone set about shaping State provision to meet new nationally agreed goals and priorities. There are simply too few experienced people to carry the level of activity and to manage the implementation of all that we have learned in the last two years from national projects and State planning activities. The college pressures from new awards mean people have less time for what appears increasingly important—reflection, liaison and debate.

I am reminded of the complexities of the environmental debate and the difficulties 'greenies' face in promoting conservation values and providing a profound, consistent critique of resource development proposals without simply being labelled as anti-development or in Hewson-speak, 'anti-jobs'.

We face that dilemma now as ACAL repositions itself to articulate a vision of the future which can inform the growth of the field rather than react to pressures from the actions taken by governments. As State bureaucrats we are attempting to form a vision and encapsulate this in the AEC/MOVEET strategic framework in a way that will move the field forward to that vision in a coherent way and promote intelligent debate to inform the process.

But every aspect of usual bureaucratic process is to aid a convergent uniform and monolithic sort of literacy rather than to nurture diversity of response.

I want to look at the implications of rapid growth in the literacy program, particularly with reference to workplace literacy, and examine the current relationship between vocational education and literacy in this period of political attention.

Workplace literacy is growing rapidly. It is a new field. Experience is in very short supply. One implication of this is that there is great pressure on practitioners to perform at high levels because the program has been identified as an 'entrepreneurial' one rather than a 'service' in some major providers. There is, as a result, an increasing separation structurally and in style between traditional adult literacy practitioners (and their practice) and the newly prominent workplace program.

Structurally, in South Australia, we conceived workplace education as a literacy and language service, a subset of the two contributing disciplines and of these two identifiable program areas. However, the rapidity of growth has quickly led to this field almost becoming a third and distinct area. We debate how to organise and support it without setting up divisions within the field of literacy and language which will get in the way of what we really want.

The challenge we now face is maintaining workplace literacy and language as an integral part of general program planning and as an integral part of the professionally linked group of literacy and ESL personnel.

People often want to specialise but there are great advantages in allowing great mobility and flexibility across the literacy/language program and maximising the opportunities for individuals to teach in a variety of contexts.

The career paths and professional linkages of those who find themselves delivering workplace literacy as part of the business arm of their organisations, as is the case in NSW and Victoria to some degree, might look quite different from those who are still structurally attached to the discipline base. I worry about the seduction of 'business' and the pressures of making money in a field that undoubtedly should be business-like but which should

have a strong equity base. However, moving rapidly almost inevitably means that the implications of these arrangements are not thought through.

Workplace practitioners talk about the integration of literacy and language into vocational education and training but what they often mean is that their separate programs are incorporated into the enterprise training strategy.

Few consider the optimum size for the program, and the proportion of effort that should be directed towards achieving the long-term incorporation of literacy and language competencies into vocational curriculum, and a long-term reduction of dependency on programs of intervention.

In addition, there is a frightening chase after WELL funds (DETAFE colleges submitted proposals totalling over $1 million this year). I wonder about the level of examination of the management infrastructure, professional development and staff recruitment and induction costs and strategies needed to ensure quality which has occurred in this process, and about the capacity within systems to provide the appropriate policy driven support and leadership to this element of the field which is doing pioneering and highly publicised and visible work.

I think that workplace is one area where we should be utilising some of our best, most experienced teachers—but pressures of growth have lead to recruitment 'off the street', induction on the run and a compromise of the growing consensus on qualifications and experience with which we define 'competence' to teach.

I for one would be very unhappy to see workplace provision grow to exceed the size of 'campus' based literacy provision in TAFE and unhappy if our structural arrangements define workplace as the major TAFE response to the literacy or language needs of industries and workers.

In saying this I'm not wishing to be merely critical—we may have little choice about some matters, but at least we could know what we are doing, consider explicitly the dangers and strategic advantages of our actions.

Perhaps we should resist the seduction of growth and look to the conservation movement for a new concept to inform our approach to management of literacy and language? I am attracted to the notion of

sustainability. There are limits to growth, if growth is going to be accompanied by improvements and maintenance of quality.

What might be the characteristics of a sustainable system of provision?

- a relationship between size and structure including geographical factors, resources, complexity of program;
- a time frame which is evolutionary, not reactive;
- policy that is broad, encompassing pragmatic pressures, inclusive and inspirational;
- structures for succession involving career mobility, promotion, professional development and professional renewal;
- a view of optimal size—critical mass which incorporates a broad commitment to quality—teachers, curriculum, outcomes, counselling/ referral.
- establish practices for accountability and evaluation which make the whole system 'problematic' and subject to review and which do not focus inclusively on prescribed outcomes for students;
- a capacity for and high regard for innovation, risk taking and experimentation with acceptance of consequent failure or less than spectacular results;
- communication patterns which are diverse, functionally effective and effective to maintain the 'human element' in the system and which emphasise participation rather than control;
- multiple points of leadership and support.

In addition to these a sustainable system will be recognisable by the high level of drive and direction from within and by a capacity to contract when resources dry up, to sustain itself in a prolonged period of drought or other adversity and to flower again in the good times.

If we manage adult literacy and language provision with a view to establishing a sustainable system, we might not have to worry quite as much about operating at the margins of our competence and energy, we might have systems which consistently deliver the outcomes needed by students

and we will know what these outcomes are and how to achieve them in a variety of contexts.

If those of us managing in systems can resist the seduction of bigness and of our indispensability, if we manage our provision in 'trust' for the next generation and conserve our human and intellectual and financial resources by operating more strategically, then perhaps we will not be disappointed by what is created over the next few years. If we lose sight of students and concentrate on managing our empires as managers, we will have a lot to answer for. A focus on students will bring us together; a focus on empires will drive us apart. Now literacy has become important there are careers to be made; we can see the movement at academic levels in the competition for credibility and influence; we can expect more men to enter the field (certainly now the workplace is in the domain).

Who helps the managers to challenge their ideas and to change their practices? Where are the mentors to those driving the systems? Who extends their concepts of what is possible and desirable? Who will remind us all that we need to explore many literacies?

This ACAL conference is virtually the only opportunity which exists for managers to do this and to look at management issues in the strongly developed context of the educational field of adult literacy and not in a rarefied disembodied context of 'management development'. That is one of the reasons I have involved myself in ACAL and hold such hopes for its future role in reminding all of us of the importance and danger of what we are doing.

What is there to read?

Susanne Bruhn
Director, Outreach Branch, Cultural and Educational Services Division,
National Library of Australia.

I have called this paper What is There to Read? because this is a question often asked in libraries throughout Australia when new adult readers, and readers with language and comprehension problems, visit the library in search of suitable resources. In the past, the answer was often "Have you looked in the children's section?" or "Do you have a reading list?". In fact, I myself was given these answers in my local library when I came to Australia seven years ago as a migrant from a non-English speaking background desperate for reading material of some intellectual and informational substance which was relatively easy-to-read. Needless to say I went away offended and completely frustrated—with what I think was a higher primary school book on the Australian constitution. That was what was available about a subject most new migrants would be interested in. This may say more about that particular library at that time than about the state of publishing of easy-to-read literature in Australia. However, it is a fact that there is a dearth of good quality reading materials which are easy-to-read and appropriate for adults. This is especially so when the literature is required for general information or enjoyment, outside of the educational setting.

I should say that these days librarians in that particular library are very conscious of the needs of people with reading problems, but also aware that there is limited choice. When I spoke to one of them a few days ago she said that the "so-called high interest-low vocabulary books for children are useless and an insult to intelligence" (she asked me not to quote her) "and their looks pathetic, cheap and nasty."

It was her opinion that "sub-standard books" actually had an adverse effect on the reader because if as a struggling reader you lose the thread for an instant, or lose interest in what you are reading, then it's hard to pick up interest again, and often it does not happen. She was speaking about children, but thought the same was the case for adults, suggesting that easy-

to-read literature needs to be "of a very high standard—a challenge to the writer and the publisher."

I will be speaking today about the outcome of the National Library's conference 'The Right to Read: Publishing for People with Reading Disabilities' which was held in Melbourne in May 1990. I intend to cover the following ground:

1. Report on particular outcomes from the conference
   - an overall summary of recommendations for the writing, content and layout of literature which meets the needs of the groups particularly in focus at the conference
   - a brief mention of the kinds of publishers and publications produced in the UK
   - a publisher's views on easy-to-read publishing
   - conference recommendations
2. Briefly look at two overseas initiatives in easy-to-read publishing
3. Briefly report on National Library activities and thoughts to date
4. I will then be seeking your comments and debate.

The aim of The Right to Read

The aim of The Right to Read conference was to stimulate the creation and publishing of suitable, age appropriate and relevant literature for specific groups within the larger group of people with literacy problems—namely those people in our community who have intellectual disabilities, specific learning disabilities, acquired dyslexia following brain injury, or are prelingually deaf. We also included migrants from a non-English speaking background. By including this group, we hoped to be able to identify commonalities in literature needs, textual requirements and practical solutions which would enable us to approach writers and publishers with broad guidelines for writing, editing and publishing and with some indication of a possible market size. Together, the groups form a considerable number of people who to varying degrees experience functional illiteracy. In a way we expected that the conference would provide the National Library with a mandate to urge writers and publishers to invest talent and money in easy-to-read resources. On the library side, a

mandate had already been given by State and Territory Libraries and by the Australian library community. They had for some years stated that if libraries are to reach and serve people with literacy problems, adequate and suitable resources would need to be developed and made available (eg Committee of Chairs of Advisory Committees on Library Services for People with Disabilities presided over by Prof. Betty Watts and The Australian Libraries Summit). Public libraries are for everyone, and they are trying to respond to the increased demand for easy-to-read resources. A recent study at Liverpool City Library (Plumer, 1992) confirms this need for adequate resources.

We know that publishers' reluctant interest in easy-to-read books stem from the fact that they live from their sales, and they perceive sales in this area as limited. As well, illustrated books are expensive to produce at high quality. At The Right to Read conference, the general educational publisher at Collins Dove, Anne Boyd, explained that an equally serious barrier for easy-to-read publishers relates to the distribution of the resources. How do book publishers reach non-readers or new readers when book stores are not interested in carrying their stock? Also, both book distributors and book stores claim their share of the cake, usually around 60% of the sales price, leaving little income for the publisher once production and royalties are paid. These are, as far as I see it, real challenges we face when we want to redress the dearth of easy-to-read resources. If publishers could see a dollar outcome, they would be more interested.

Another big problem is that authors usually do not set out to write specifically for people with literacy problems or wish to restrict themselves to writing in a simple manner, at least not for adults. Naturally, simple adult books do exist, and many are very good, take for instance Albert Facey's book *A Fortunate Life*, or Sally Morgan's *My Place*. Both have proved fairly easy-to-read, understand and follow. However, I do not think that the authors set out to write them 'easy'. They just happened to use a natural language and the ideas and concepts were straightforward. Also, characters were real people and there were not too many of them. A large number of the popular romance kinds of books are considered simple too, to the extent of being simplistic. Whether they meet the particular requirements of people with literacy problems is another thing, with a number of components to evaluate.

Recommendations for the writing, content and lay out

At The Right to Read conference, five presenters carefully identified the characteristics of readers in each of the groups in focus (prelingual deafness, intellectual disability, brain injury, specific learning disability and non-English speaking background) (Giorcelli, Clunies-Ross, Alexander, Whiting, Dalton, 1991). In her summary of these presentations, aimed at identifying common criteria for writing and publishing, Christa van Kraayenoord said:

"We...learned that the reading abilities of the readers vary in degree...what we might say is evident for one type of disability or disadvantage may not be true for all individuals with that same disability or disadvantage. This is because the people have differences in background, attitudes and special difficulties. In our desire then to produce print materials to one group, we need to be aware of the individual differences within that group. The same is true if we look across groups. Once again the heterogeneity of people is apparent...It is my belief that individual differences both within and across groups cannot be stressed sufficiently."

"Nevertheless, there are a number of common themes around which we can group the various features that should be considered when writing for individuals with special needs. These themes include: the types of written material, the content and subject matter, the structure and tempo, characters and readability factors." (Kraayenoord, 1991)

Christa discussed each of these in turn, approximately as follows. While generalised, I believe that the identification of these common features for easy-to-read literature would be useful guides for writers and publishers, and they were a major outcome of the conference.

Appropriate materials are required

Individuals become better at reading through reading, so large quantities are required for practice and improvement. A wide range of materials are required allowing for individual choice: books, magazines and newspapers, and also non-book materials, as reading may be stimulated in a variety of ways and information obtained through many means (eg audio books, book and tape kits, captioned videos, computer software). Materials are required for children—for school and out of school settings and for adults—in work, home and wider community situations.

Content and subject matter

All presenters stressed that easy-to-read materials only become appropriate, or suitable, if the content and subject matter are meaningful. Content has to be concerned with people, events, ideas and issues that individuals can relate to and identify with.

All presenters also stressed the need for materials to be appropriate for the reader's chronological age, and should relate to people's interests—that are age appropriate. The presenters all provided examples of kinds of materials particularly relevant for specific groups. Seen in their totality I would say that they demonstrate the diversity of the group of people in need of easy-to-read materials. Christa summarised: "We know that people learn to read more easily if material is meaningful to them and if they are interested in the ideas and/or the way ideas are expressed. Therefore, the materials should deal with ideas that readers are familiar with, are interested in, and want to read about". The author Hazel Edward, who spoke at The Right to Read conference about her experiences in writing for adult literacy purposes added some spice to the easy-to-read recipe: humour. The papers from The Right to Read conference provide many ideas for content.

Characters

Books should portray real people or characters with whom the readers can relate—'someone like me who has real difficulties, who tussles with real problems and discovers real solutions.' A limited number of characters permits easier tracking of the character's involvement in the action and lessens memory processing demands. I think it may also make it easier to identify with characters if there are only a few who you get to know well.

Structure and Tempo

With respect to structure and tempo the presenters all suggested that readers need to be plunged into exciting action immediately. This will get readers into the story quickly without losing interest. The plots should be simple, in sequence and linear. Plots that involve the flashback technique or use a distorted time chronology are more difficult, even confusing for many readers. The use of chapters and shorter paragraphs, and to some extent the use of shorter summaries at the beginning of new chapters were recommended by some presenters. The use of subheadings, the introduction

of key vocabulary (in context and at the start) and summaries involving a list of main points were suggested by some for non-fiction books.

Readability

All presenters stressed that language should be natural in order to maximise the use of the reader's own language abilities. Natural language also provides for prediction and use of context clues—regarded as important strategic reading behaviours.

All presenters suggested that simple sentence structure consistent with natural language patterns should be used and that long, complicated sentences should be avoided. Naturally, the shorter sentences should fall naturally and facilitate the gaining of meaning from the text.

All presenters indicated that the majority of words chosen should be words the readers would know well and therefore predictable for the reader. However, most stressed the inappropriateness of controlled vocabulary as much understanding can be derived from context. Rather, there was strong support for the theory of interest and motivation as important factors in the recognition of words in natural language.

Presenters suggested the explicit introduction of jargon or genre-specific words, or words otherwise expected to be unknown to the reader, and explained through deliberate context clues in sentences of known words. Abstract concepts and figurative language should not be used. There was also strong emphasis on Australian English word usage.

In terms of the high interest-low vocabulary trade books, Christa van Kraayenoord made the comment that what appears to be the crucial factor with respect to how these materials are perceived is the quality of the story. Authors embarking on the writing of easy-to-read books for adults would be well advised to take to heart the suggestions by the presenters relating to possible topics and readability (beyond considerations of vocabulary).

It may be appropriate here to mention that with some people, and at The Right to Read conference, specifically prelingually deaf children (children with Downes Syndrome were also mentioned), reading may be a major vehicle for learning spoken language and learning to speak. While the contexts are very different, I think this stresses the need for natural language in easy-to-read books.

Book design

While the writing of an appropriate manuscript is important, the publishers' roles of editing, printing, binding and production are equally important. All presenters referred specifically to elements of design. These include outward appearance, print, layout and paper.

Outward appearance

For the outward appearance, the most important factor is that easy-to-read materials look as normal and attractive as possible, preferably as a pocket book, naturally with fewer pages as books should be shorter. The cover is of paramount importance, as it may determine whether the book is picked or not. Naturally, the cover picture should give an idea about the contents.

In addition, it is best if books are bound so that they can lie open flat. This prevents the reader from having to read a curved page.

Legibility

Although individual preferences would apply, most people would require their easy-to-read books printed in a slightly larger print size (12 point was mentioned as a fairly good size), the type font should be serif, and spacing between the lines should be generous. It is best if the paper is not white, but off-white or a natural grey to minimise the contrast with black print. An uncluttered, well organised page layout is important, with ample white space to facilitate the reader. This means wide, clear margins on both sides and on top and bottom and frequent use of paragraphs that are clearly distinguished. It is helpful if the right margin is not justified as that leads the eye. Chapter headings should be used and they should be clear and aid prediction.

Also the number of illustrations and the way they are used make for a variety in layout. Naturally, the design for fiction and non-fiction will be different.

Illustrations

Illustrations play an important role in easy-to-read materials. Illustrations supplement the text and provide clues where understanding of the text may be difficult. They should be used to clarify and support the text, to provide a meaningful context for the ideas expressed in the text, to assist the reader in processing, predicting and generalising from the text and to prompt recall of

the text. Illustrations must support the text in all facets, for some groups they must be unambiguous, focus on the key concept of ideas and be made up of meaningful elements. Clear line drawings and photographs were mentioned by some presenters as being useful. Naturally, illustrations must be placed close to the text to which they refer. Page layout is important here, too.

Illustrations furthermore have the advantage of creating an interest and motivating readers—that is if they are attractive. The opposite may be the case if they are ugly, childish or do not pick up the tone of the text.

Audio tapes

The use of an audio version together with printed book was recommended by most presenters at The Right to Read conference and it is certainly the experience in libraries that literacy students and people with reading problems are very interested in book and tape kits. The audio version assists comprehension of the text and for people with reading problems a speed slower than normal speech is generally recommended. A number of kit materials are available from overseas, and Narkaling Productions in Western Australia have produced a wide range of very good materials over the last few years. Speakers recommended that authentic Australian accents be used in all audio materials, so Narkaling is spot on there.

I believe it is important to remember, that as well as assisting the reading process, audio tapes stimulate interest in reading and give the readers the opportunity to gain the same reading experiences or information as their friends. In terms of motivation, this aspect should not be underestimated.

As I said earlier, there is no one way to write or design easy-to-read materials. Readers are individuals, and so are authors. And readers have individual strengths and weaknesses. I am sure that the criteria identified for people with the disadvantages in focus for The Right to Read would apply to almost everyone with literacy problems. So, if the broad guidelines are followed by authors, editors, illustrators and publishers we may be getting somewhere. Certainly, Hazel Edwards seemed to write applying most of the guidelines already. Her paper WORDFUSS (1991) is illuminating for the thoughts and considerations which an experienced and successful writer gives to her writing throughout the whole creative process.

She mentions particularly a need for trialling to see whether the text works (she mentions particularly the need to pass the yarn test). I believe that trialling of texts and illustrations is vital for the success of any easy-to-read publication.

UK easy-to-read publishing

We asked the library consultant, Margaret Marshall, in the UK to specifically look at What is There to Read for adults with reading disabilities, in particular adults with intellectual disabilities. She mentioned that in the United Kingdom there are approximately 200 separate publishers of easy-to-read materials. Most appear to be specialist or educational publishers in the following groups:

- educational publishers producing 'special needs' books for what she called the less able reader in school or college. There are over 1000 titles, usually fiction, especially for teenagers;
- mainstream trade publishers of childrens books designed for use by children who need easy-to-read material, including major information book publishers;
- specialist organisations concerned with children and adults with special needs, including adult literacy learning materials and fiction and bibliography;
- groups and individuals who produce for local use.

Despite the varied publishing activities, Margaret Marshall found it difficult to find resources suitable for adults with intellectual disabilities, her special area of interest. The ones she found are listed in the bibliography Read Easy which contains about 350 selected items, about half of which are computer software. While some of the titles are fine, many are depressingly unattractive and you wonder whether they will be read willingly. In her search for resources, a number of ordinary books were also identified in libraries. Despite their popularity, they were not included in the bibliography. This is a great pity because these are the books most likely to be readily available.

'There's not the demand'

Anne Boyd, the general educational publisher from Collins Dove, also drew the conference delegates' attention to ordinary books saying that all good writers would make sure that the message is clear and the contents meaningful. Similarly, experienced publishers would ensure that the message is clear. She used picture books as an example, illustrating that the requirements discussed already would be met in the production, if appropriate. She suggested that there is no particular need for special materials, and said that there are plenty of good books and good Australian books around.

She did, I should stress, refer specifically to children's books and she spoke specifically against what she called 'structured phonic schemes'. Also Margaret Marshall's groups of publishers were primarily concerned with children and teenagers.

What about easy-to-read resources for adults? What about resources which are supplementary to education, supplementary to literacy teaching resources? Do we have much choice here for resources which are meaningful, age appropriate, attractive etc?

As I said earlier on, Anne Boyd mentioned that illustrated books are expensive to produce, that the market for easy-to-read materials is considered small and a difficult one to identify for the purpose of promotion and sales. According to the presenters at the conference, the market does not appear small at all, especially not if the materials are good. I am sure that it is very difficult to reach the market unless marketing and distribution practices are put in place. I am also sure that libraries would need to support the publishing by purchasing in adequate numbers.

The question is how do we make commercial publishers become more involved with the publishing of easy-to-read books and magazines? How do we convince them about market size, inspire new distribution methods? And how do we stimulate authors to write? How do we educate reviewers and granting bodies to understand that easy-to-read is also valuable?

Two overseas easy-to-read publishing developments

Two Northern European countries, Sweden and The Netherlands decided in the sixties and seventies respectively that government funding would be

required to boost easy-to-read publishing. The approaches have been different in the two countries. In the Netherlands, the Dutch Centre of Public Libraries and Literature took on the leadership role, and established a working group to stimulate the production of easy-to-read materials for people with reading problems. The group also provides advice to libraries and has established criteria for what constitutes good easy-to-read literature for people with various reading disabilities. A logo was introduced which should readily identify suitable resources. The group reads manuscripts and provides feedback to writers, illustrators and publishers and is also responsible for assigning the quality mark logo. Authors' competitions for easy-to-read books have also been organised to stimulate new writing. The primary focus is on materials for children and young adults, in a variety of formats. Mieke Starmans van Haren gave a paper about the Dutch approach at The Right to Read conference (Starmans van Haren, 1991).

The Swedish approach has been different. Established and funded by the Swedish government, the Easy to Read Foundation commissions the writing and illustration of easy-to-read materials and provides funding to authors and illustrators in order to attract them to the material and support them during the creative process. The authors and illustrators follow broad guidelines, and their work is evaluated by a group of experts. While in process, the works are continuously trialled with individuals within the primary target group of people with mild intellectual disabilities. About 20 high quality books, mainly for adults, are produced every year. There are now about 250. Also, a fortnightly easy-to-read newspaper is published (8 sides). It is very attractive. Until recently, books were published by trade publishers whose only expense was the printing and distribution costs. They received the script and illustrations ready to go. In return, they also received all income. Recently, the Foundation has moved towards becoming its own publisher, thus gaining full control and receiving the income. The main reason for the change is said to be the need for the easy-to-read books to be distributed in a more effective way. This is despite a sale of about 2500 copies, which in a way does not sound too bad in a country with only 8 million inhabitants. Libraries have been the primary buyers. Book shops are not all that interested in carrying the easy-to-read stock. Last year, direct marketing to the target group of people with reading disabilities was

introduced in the form of a book club, with no obligation to buy. An easy-to-read newsletter supports this book club, and it is a story on its own. It is attractive, follows all the right principles and sells to 6000 subscribers. The Foundation has total control of the paper, but requires five times as many subscribers to recover cost.

It is interesting to note that despite the orientation towards people with an intellectual disability, the Swedish easy-to-read titles are used by people with a wide range of literacy problems. I think this is very encouraging.

Unlike the Dutch, the Swedish foundation does not strive to provide consultancy to libraries or to identify existing resources and label them with a logo. It monitors research closely and has in the past also commissioned research. That was when it formed part of the Swedish Ministry for Education (Bruhn, 1990; Belander & Lundstrom, 1987).

The Swedish success has stimulated initiatives in other Nordic countries and it has stimulated me. Whether we in Australia can attract the same level of government interest and support for easy-to-read publishing is doubtful, especially in the age of recession. If we can develop a partnership between the public and commercial spheres, it may be worth a try.

The Right to Read Resolutions

What should happen in Australia to boost the publishing of the wide range of resources called for by all the presenters at The Right to Read conference and requested in Australian libraries? The conference resolutions provided some ideas. A fair bit of attention was also given to the identification of existing resources (you would probably say that's a librarian's syndrome).

The resolutions included the following:

- establishment of easy-to-read working groups in all states, each focussing on a specific subgroup;
- development of criteria for writing and publishing of easy-to-read materials for each subgroup;
- purchase of books listed in the Margaret Marshall bibliography Read Easy
- research to ascertain what materials exist in Australia using similar criteria to those employed by Margaret Marshall;

- list identified resources in the national bibliographic database and ensure that they can be easily identified through a flagging mechanism;
- market research;
- exploration of possible subsidies or grants for the creation and publishing of easy-to-read resources;
- information exchange in National Library's newsletter Link-up;
- identification of organisations, groups, publishers etc with an interest in easy-to-read.

Activities since then

That was two years ago. Since then a working group has been established and abolished again in Western Australia. It suggested that a national working group be established, drawing on a range of experts nationally and providing effective lobbying of the major publishers, government departments and arts bodies. We have not decided on this yet, but we have decided that the national and state libraries meet with key organisations in May next year to explore a range of issues related to the creation and publishing of easy-to-read materials, funding being one important aspect to discuss.

To help us in the promotion of the concept of easy to read literature and to share the experience of the Swedish easy-to-read creation, we have had three booklets translated from Swedish for publication later this year. One, called The Simple and the Difficult (Hedin, forthcoming) is written by a recognised poet and easy-to-read author about his experiences and thoughts in writing poetry for people with intellectual disabilities. It is a moving account. To supplement it, there is a collection of the poems entitled Poems Together (Hedin, forthcoming). The third booklet is The Illustration in Easy to Read.

We have recently come to the conclusion that we cannot be too narrow or specific in establishing criteria for writing and publishing. We need to reach a fairly broad group of people with reading disabilities. At this stage it would be unrealistic to go into too much detail to meet the specific needs of people with a specific reading disability. The common rules of thumb identified at The Right to Read are relevant. Whether our criteria would be as broad as those given for reader friendly documents is doubtful. We will

continue to be concerned primarily with resources which can be enjoyed or information gained from rather than resources developed for literacy teaching purposes.

Most state libraries have purchased the books in Margaret Marshall's bibliography and the National Library has acquired a small demonstration collection of some titles. They have been entered on the National Bibliographic Database. We have also submitted proposals for flagging of easy-to-read materials in online catalogues to national and international cataloguing bodies. With time, that would ensure that easy-to-read resources can be readily identified in libraries-provided cataloguers are kept aware of the need to do so.

We have not embarked on the challenge of identifying existing, adequate titles and I cannot see how we can without the allocation of earmarked funding. I wonder whether others have been on the track before us? I would appreciate any advice or comments.

We have not yet embarked on a market research program, for several reasons. Initially this was because we felt we did not have any suitable examples for the carrying out of research. That was when we still focussed specifically on resources for people with intellectual disabilities. Now that we are broadening our interest to encompass the larger group of people with literacy problems, we may not require other figures than those provided by Rosie Wickert in No Single Measure (1990): the functional illiteracy of 1 million people. These figures were used by the Department of Health, Housing and Community Service in its 1989 Report on Print Disability Review. In order to convince publishers that all these functionally illiterate people actually want books, it may, however, be necessary to conduct market research which actually tries to ascertain the number of copies which schools, TAFE colleges, libraries, resource centres and individuals may purchase should Australian quality easy-to-read material be published to a larger extent. The market research should perhaps also establish if alternative distribution strategies should be developed and what they should be. If you are aware of any exemplary easy-to-read books I would be pleased to be given their titles.

We are moderately aware of the interest organisations in the field of literacy, but also aware that we may encounter a conflict of interest in that we are not all that interested in the teaching of literacy, but rather in providing literature and information for people who may never learn to read well or for people to enjoy reading while they learn to read. I would be most interested in hearing how we can best work together and who you think would be our best partners.

We are also aware of the interest organisations which aim at strengthening the rights of people with disabilities by providing information to them which may assist them pursuing their rights and involvement in society. However, we need to look more broadly. A dilemma may be that the more broadly we look, the more unfocused our approach may become. For instance, should we set out to stimulate adult fiction, or should we prioritise informational types of books? Some claim that there may be more public funding available for the production of the latter—informational materials. The presenters at The Right to Read called for lots of everything. I would be most interested in hearing what your priorities would be.

We are moderately aware of funding bodies in the arts and grant-giving corporate bodies favouring people with disabilities. I would be most interested in your ideas for partners in public and private organisations.

Lastly, I would be interested in your comments on conclusions drawn at The Right to Read. You may not have all the answers now but if you would like to give me your thoughts at a later stage, I can be contacted on (06) 262 1251.

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Participant observation: a way of conducting research

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Do you really know what goes on in your classroom? Are you aware who dominates discussion in group work? Action research gives us the opportunity to examine our purposes and practices in teaching. It encourages us to make our thinking about action more explicit through observing and engaging in classroom experiences and practices. One way of conducting action research is to engage in participant observation, which may be seen as a systematic attempt to discover the knowledge a group of people have learned and are using to organise their behaviour (Spradley, 1979). This form of ethnographic study may include "interviewing, observing, mining available documents and records, taking account of non-verbal cues and interpreting inadvertent unobtrusive measures" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

However, fundamental to the success of any naturalistic study is the role of the participant observer. Through observations you are "systematically looking at and recording behaviour for the purpose of making instructional decisions" (Pasanella and Volkmor, 1977). Usually, this means beginning with general questions to get a broad picture, then refining it by focusing on particular aspects of the picture.

But you may be wondering why you should choose participant observation for your action research? As a teacher, you are in the best position to observe what goes on in your classroom, in other words, to learn the 'culture' of your classroom. Through observation you can analyse: what people do (behaviour); what people use (artefacts), and what people say (speech messages). You can also evaluate:

- group participation and responsiveness
- individual behaviour within a group
- individual and group attitudes
- peer dynamics

- classroom structure and organisation
- teaching methods and materials
- teaching style
- learning environment
- student—teacher interactions
- development of the learner (history of success)

You may also choose to have a colleague conduct observations in your classroom, in order to validate your own observations, or to document your teaching practice.

The first step in participant observation is to identify a 'social situation'. I identified three social situations in which checkout operators commonly operated: at the checkout, in the kiosk or tobacco shop, and at the shelves in the supermarket (Searle, 1991). If you are observing in a classroom you will need to locate a place where you can watch people as well as participate in activities. You may choose to focus on group work, whole class, or social interactions during coffee break. In each situation you will be observing: the place, the people (actors), and what is happening (the activities).

'Place' means any physical setting, so you need to describe both the space itself and the objects found there. Even in the familiar surroundings of a supermarket, I soon found that I didn't know what many of the objects were called, so I relied on 'insider' information to help me; that is asking the experts, the checkout operators themselves. Also when I started to observe the 'actors' all I saw were uniformed checkout operators. It was only with repeated observations that identifying features or behaviours emerged. Then I realised that behaviours and communication varied as the operators interacted with other classes of actors such as customers (of differing ages and personalities), the different staff in the store, sales representatives etc.

The third element in the social situation is 'the activities' which take place. At first you might only see what you expect to see, that is what you take for granted is going on, whether in the supermarket or the classroom. Again, it is only through repeated observations that individual acts fall into recognisable patterns of activity, for example packing groceries into bags at

the supermarket. Sometimes these activities may be linked together to form larger patterns or 'events' such as all the activities, from fluffing out a new plastic bag, through scanning the items, packing them, to payment for the order, may be seen as 'an event'.

In my case, I was especially interested in the spoken and written language of the checkout operators. However, I found I had to broaden my initial focus so as to include the multiple sign systems with which the operators had to interact. So, after identifying the actors and the activities, I began to focus on language and communication, particularly that associated with 'events'.

There are two basic approaches to observation, continuous observation and sampling observation. The continuous approach consists of observing over a given period of time such as an hour, a day, week or month. This is a good way to start in order to get an overview of what is going on. In my case it also provided an overview in the form of 'a day in the life of a checkout operator'.

Sampling observation involves relatively short, focused periods of observation. These may be random periods of time or observation of random actors, activities etc. More usually you would use sampling observation to clarify emerging questions such as "What does the checkout operator say/do when X happens?"

As you observe it is useful to make written field notes on site, in which each actor is identified and information is recorded exactly as it is spoken or referred to, including use of any 'inside' words or phrases. You may choose to time your observations, so many minutes observing, X minutes writing notes. These notes are then expanded with as much detail as possible, immediately after the observation. At the same time a fieldwork journal should be kept in which to record your experiences, ideas, feelings or problems as well as a record of analysis, interpretations or insights. It is also important that you check your observation and perceptions with the actors for verification, correction or extension. You may also wish to identify, collect and analyse documents or records from each social situation, as these are in the language of the site and provide a rich source of contextually relevant information.

As the data is collected it must be systematically classified. This may be done with reference to Spradley's (1980) broad categories: space, objects, actors, activities, time, goals, feelings and routines. You will find that computers are really useful when it comes to cross-referencing. As your study proceeds you will be constantly sifting this data, classifying and reclassifying, for example "Is X similar to or different from Y?" in order to identify emerging themes.

As an ethnographer you will be learning from people rather than studying them and it is important that they do not feel threatened by your research or uneasy about being observed. The aim should be to establish a relationship of trust which should be beneficial to all.

Some of the advantages in using participant observation as a research methodology include:

- the focus on facts (not impressions or judgements)
- observation is a direct measure in a natural setting (as opposed to psychological testing in contrived settings)
- observation may be conducted during class time
- observation allows you to focus on particular targets and identify previously unnoticed behaviours/use of spoken or written language
- observation increases awareness of how learning can be facilitated
- observation can aid in the selection of appropriate teaching strategies and materials
- observation is a useful tool to evaluate affective, social and management behaviour as well as the appropriateness and effectiveness of student language use.

Some of the disadvantages of participant observation as a research methodology include:

- participant observation could be seen as intervention as it may cause a change in student behaviour
- this method needs TIME:

— observations should be conducted over a period of time

— data analysis is very time consuming

- sometimes it is difficult to 'see' what is going on
- observations and inferences need to be verified by more than one source (triangulation)
- this method results in vast quantities of data — you need to know where to stop and how best to analyse the data
- human error:

— observer bias

— you record what you think happened or make assumptions

— accuracy and limit of human memory

- does not allow for external influences, e.g. what happened at home or work so you need to interview as well.

In conclusion, although participant observation is a time consuming method of conducting action research it does produce some very valuable outcomes. Use of systematic observation allows you to:

- gain valuable insights into what is actually going on in your class
- gain ideas for future lesson plans, resources etc
- address issues of equity, power or control in the class
- make decisions about assessment, when and what type
- look for causal relationships between:

— students

— student(s) — teacher

— student(s) — environment

- evaluate your own teaching practice
- record the specific language of your students using precise descriptors so that other literacy teachers can identify exactly what is happening through the voices of your students.

Finally, participant observation is a very enjoyable way of conducting action research. By providing rich descriptions of your particular situations and students you can contribute to the general knowledge of what we do as literacy teachers.

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Numeracy and how we learn

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"Numeracy and How We Learn" is one of the recent national projects funded by the TAFE National Staff Development Committee. It was released to all TAFE colleges and libraries in 1992 and is not available for purchase. It targets teachers of numeracy or general mathematics at any level, as well as TAFE vocational teachers whose subjects include mathematics and its applications in work contexts. The project writers, Jeannette Thiering and Rosalind Barbaro, who developed it in 1991 at Gosford TAFE, NSW, presented an abbreviated version of the program at the ACAL Conference, with the assistance of Ian Fegent.

The workshop has two main sections. The first section focuses on the meaning of the word 'numeracy': what it includes and does not include and what makes a person numerate. Participants do not just 'sit there' but have to work through three activities which confront their ideas of what maths we use in everyday life–personally and across a huge range of jobs–and stimulates them to ask whether everyone's numeracy is the same. Do we all need the same maths? Do we each need the same maths today as we used to need? The activities gradually get the participants involved in working together in interactive groups. There is plenty of opportunity for discussion and for contributions of individuals' experiences in learning and teaching maths. Most importantly, as a private exercise, participants write their own definition of 'numeracy', adjusting it as their ideas are challenged by the activities and by a short video. Before these personal definitions are finalised participants read about 30 of the responses to a 1991 national survey of teachers' opinions on "what is numeracy?". These contain some very provocative and stimulating ideas across a wide spectrum of educational opinion. No-one could agree with all of them!

The second section of the workshop covers the key principles which are widely recognised as the criteria of good mathematics education: teaching problem solving and the use of calculators, keeping content relevant, using

concrete materials, integrating maths with language and improving assessment methods. It gives a very quick overview of the practical teaching implications of recent theories and well-respected research on how people learn mathematics. Problem solving is investigated with worked examples for participants to analyse. There are specimen lessons showing several ways to teach with a variety of concrete materials, emphasising that we should break away from relying too much on the traditional methods which stressed rote skills, accuracy and speed. Participants find out why it is valid to have a thorough commitment to calculators, to encourage lots of conversation and writing in maths lessons, and to allow the students to have their say in making their learning contexts relevant and interesting, according to their life and goals. Of course, approaches to student assessment have to keep pace with these ideas and there are some new assessment styles for discussion.

Both sections of the workshop focus on the importance of building up students' confidence in using mathematics. This is the key to being numerate.

During the presentation of 'Numeracy and How We Learn' at the ACAL Conference the work in small groups was absorbing, plenary discussions were vigorous, with more than an occasional joke, and there was plenty of sharing of opinions, ideas and practical suggestions.

'Numeracy and How We Learn' is written in such detail that it could be presented by teachers who are fairly inexperienced in providing professional training. Experienced trainers would be able to use it flexibly, making adjustments to suit the particular group, provided that the key features of the program were not 'lost'. All the OHP transparencies, handouts and focus materials are supplied. Some very isolated teachers could work through it on their own or with a mentor. No teaching materials are included for classroom use. Instead, the examples of how students 'do maths' and the specimen lessons show teachers how to put the suggested approaches into practice and stimulate them to take the approaches back to their own workplace.

'Numeracy and How We Learn' was planned as either a 'stand alone' package or one to be combined with two other training programs which are

currently available: the three mathematics sections of 'Working Together' (NSW TAFE Commission) and 'Breaking the Maths Barrier' (Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE, Vic). The TAFE National Staff Development Committee has distributed funds for workshops to be held in all states and territories in 1992-3.

From radical rhetoric to the sobering reality of current policy options around Adult Basic Education in South Africa

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I am from Cape Town in South Africa where I work for a non-government adult basic education organisation called USWE (Use, Speak & Write English). I am currently attached to NCELTR at Macquarie University for six months in order to research particular aspects of language, literacy and basic education for adults in Australia. I will also be informing people about our work in South Africa, as on this occasion today.

Before I proceed I would like to clarify the title of my paper and specifically my use of the term 'adult basic education' or ABE. In South Africa we use the terms 'literacy', 'ABE' and 'ESL' very differently from here in Australia. In South Africa, ABE is gaining acceptance as the umbrella term encompassing language, literacy and general education for adults with little or no formal education. Although many people use the term literacy in the same way, strictly speaking literacy refers to first language reading and writing skills. ESL, on the other hand, denotes second language learning. However, for some time, both literacy and ESL have incorporated areas of general knowledge such as health, geography, history, economics, numeracy, etc. A further complication is the fact that ESL work has not been confined to developing oral language skills but has also entailed developing further the very rudimentary first language literacy skills that learners bring to ESL classes. Perhaps the closest Australian description of ABE learners in South Africa might be 'non-English speaking background (NESB), low level learners'.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine some trends in adult basic education policy thinking in South Africa in the light of Australian experiences. This interactive paper has four parts as follows. I shall begin by painting a backdrop to adult basic education work in South Africa. I shall then outline some emerging policy options and debates around ABE.

Thirdly, and with your help, we will look critically at two key policy areas, in the light of Australian experiences. Finally, we will attempt to draw some conclusions about the differences and similarities between ABE in our respective countries and the potential for learning from one another.

So, the four key questions which I shall address today are as follows:

1. What is happening in the ABE field in South Africa?
2. What major policy options & debates are emerging?
3. How viable are these options in the light of Australian experiences?
4. Conclusion: Should South Africa take the Australian path?

1. Painting the backdrop

(Extract from a video on ABE in South Africa called 'Eyes to See to Read'.)

Recent statistics about literacy in South Africa suggest that of the 40 million+- people living in South Africa, between 15 and 17 million are deemed to be 'illiterate' or 'semi-literate'. These are primarily Black adults. Of the total Black population of 28 million, approximately 70% are in need of basic education of some kind, as opposed to roughly 1% of the White population. These estimates are based on official school attendance figures. They assess that a person is literate if he/she has attended school for a minimum of 6 years. Obviously this is a very problematic yardstick. Qualitative research into people's language and literacy skills levels, such as Australia's 'No Single Measure', is virtually non-existent in South Africa. This is indicative of the general neglect of Black education and of adult basic education for many decades.

The video showed some of the language and literacy problems experienced by Black migrant workers in South Africa who come to town from rural areas to find work. This is not the only group of people who experience acute problems. Many urban-born people are also unable to cope adequately with the demands of a literate urban, industrial environment. Many workers in both the formal and informal sectors are held back by discriminatory legislation, by racist attitudes and by their lack of skills, general education, job training opportunities and career prospects. The language policy in South Africa has also served to reinforce these

inequalities. This situation is the direct result of economic exploitation and the social and political engineering associated with colonialism and, in particular, with the apartheid policies of the Nationalist government since 1948.

The case of people living in the rural areas is more ambiguous. According to the statistics, a large percentage of rural people are deemed 'illiterate' or 'semi-literate' because they have not attended school for the required minimum period. In reality, many rural communities just do not need the kind of language and literacy practices that characterise white dominated urban life in South Africa. Some communities have different kinds of language and literacy needs which change as people's life circumstances alter. Quite clearly the picture is far more complex than the neat statistics would suggest. What is desperately needed is more qualitative, ethnographic research into the real literacy and language needs of the vast numbers of disadvantaged South Africans.

At the moment, of the 100,000 learners reached nationally, approximately 90,000 attend government and industry programs, with 10,000 catered for by the NGOs. Therefore, the total number of learners reached comprises less than 1% of potential learners.

The different providers of ABE also offer different kinds of language and literacy for different purposes. On the whole, government and industry provision is perceived as conservative and 'domesticating'. Much NGO work, on the other hand, has aspired to the Freirean notions of 'liberating literacy' and 'conscientisation'. However, translating the rhetoric into practice has proven to be far more difficult than anyone envisaged. The capacity of NGOs to undertake this demanding work has been severely hampered by a number of factors. For instance, NGO work has always suffered from inadequate resourcing and financial insecurity. Secondly, it lacks status and has assumed very low priority. Thirdly, the lack of professional standing, staff training opportunities and career paths has meant that very few highly skilled personnel have been attracted to this field. Finally, it cannot draw upon any substantial documented research base. This situation has been exacerbated by intense political harassment of many of the so-called 'progressive' NGOs over the years, including my own,

particularly during the 1980s. All of these factors have restricted the scope and impact of NGO work and attempts to achieve greater co-ordination. In spite of these drawbacks, some NGO's have managed to produce very innovative, qualitative research, training and materials (NEPI, 1992).

2. Some ABE policy proposals

At this point in our history when South Africa is on the brink of a new post-apartheid era, negotiated politics are slowly replacing oppositional politics. At this unique historical juncture a pragmatic, economically-driven, depoliticised and 'top-down' agenda for ABE is becoming evident.

During this transition period the radical rhetoric of the 1980s is rapidly disappearing and being replaced by the discourse of economic pragmatism. This is what underpins much of the current deliberations in the two policy areas which I now describe. These are firstly, the proposal to set up a national system for ABE, and secondly, issues around language policy and the curriculum.

A national system

Firstly, in order to expand ABE work, a major proposal is that we set up a formal, national, ABE system which is controlled by an 'interventionist' central government. This system would be framed by policies around human resources development and affirmative action, with ultimate control of ABE residing with the human resources development or adult education departments. This scenario is strongly advocated by Cosatu (the largest mainly Black trade union congress in the country), with backing from the ANC (African National Congress). They see ABE as an essential part of a 'high participation, high skill' model of human resources development which is linked to the introduction of more efficient technology. Such a model is deemed essential in order to begin to restructure the economy and to promote 'economic growth through redistribution'. They emphasise increased exports and growth in the manufacturing sector of the economy. In order to achieve these ends, Cosatu believes that ABE should be integrally linked to national job standards, to job training and to a system of national vocational qualifications. At the same time, both education and work should link with the formal schooling system, so that we end up with three parallel systems in close articulation (Cosatu, 1991, 1992).

As a result of these dramatic shifts in our country, the discourse is now no longer dominated by notions of 'empowerment', 'education for liberation' or 'transformation'—the slogans of the 80s; but about 'economic growth', 'national standards', 'modules', 'competencies', 'exit and entry points', 'articulation' and 'multi-skilled workers'. For many of us working on the ground in NGOs, this is a new discourse which we are frantically learning to employ so as to engage with the policy-makers. A major concern for us with the idea of a national system is the fact that only urban-based industrial male workers, who comprise 30% of the economically active population, are likely to benefit from the proposed system as it stands. The other 70% who live in semi-urban, squatter and rural areas and who are considered the most disadvantaged sectors of our society are not really catered for in this system. This runs the risk of widening the gap between these sectors, as workers receive more opportunities for social and economic advancement through training and education. As the 'worker aristocracy' flourishes, the urban and rural poor are further disempowered.

Within this proposed national framework, other key areas of debate are language policy and the curriculum.

Language policy and the curriculum

Language policy and curriculum are two integrally linked policy areas. The official language policy in South Africa states that the two official languages are English and Afrikaans—the 'White' languages. In reality, the vast majority of South Africans are Black and speak nine major Black languages. With the changing political climate, bodies such as the ANC are looking at a new national language policy. Although this has not been finalised yet, the indications are that we will have a policy of regional bilingualism (at the very least), with English being compulsory, plus at least one Black language. All regional languages will have equal status, while English will be the language of national unity and of international communication.

This language policy has major implications for any national, co-ordinated and articulated ABE system. Three key curriculum questions which arise are:

- Through which languages(s) will people learn literacy, general education and training? In other words, what will be the preferred medium of instruction for different courses and at different stages?

- What goes into a national curriculum and can we ensure that this is fair for all learners?

- Is a competency-based model of curriculum design and assessment the best option?

I now address each of these questions in turn.

Language, literacy and medium of instruction

Through which language(s) should people become literate, become educated in a broad sense and be trained for work? Research clearly indicates that the best language for learning literacy skills is the language which is the most familiar to the learner, i.e the mother tongue. In South Africa this issue is complicated by the multilingual nature of society and the national language policy. Apart from English and Afrikaans, the nine major African languages are spoken by the majority of people. If a language policy of regional bilingualism prevails, with equal status given to all languages, but with English as the language of unity and of international communication, then it is highly likely that English will assume a higher status and will be sought after. Consequently, the demand for English literacy programs and for the ABE programs which use English as the medium of instruction will be very strong (NEPI, 1992).

One option which is emerging relates to the notion of 'learner pathways', a term borrowed from here.

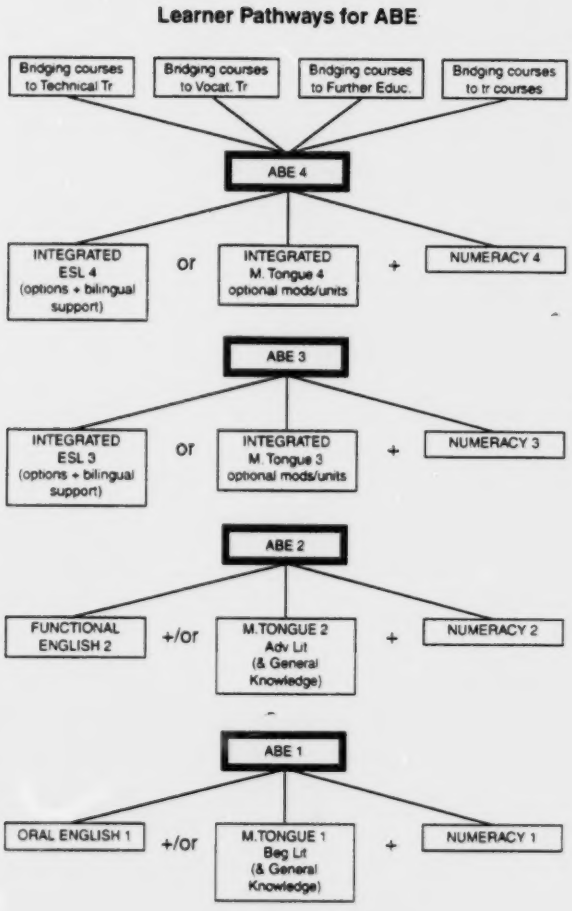

Figure 1—Learner pathways in South Africa

This diagram attempts to capture what is in fact actually happening in many ABE classes in South Africa. Learners are choosing different courses and practical constraints may determine the courses available for learners and, therefore, the pathways taken. The result is that some learners pursue numeracy courses and/or mother tongue literacy courses or English literacy courses; while others prefer to take mother tongue courses with an oral or survival English component and transfer later to English courses. Yet even within English courses a degree of bilingual support has evolved naturally in the form of code-switching by bilingual teachers and the provision of

learner materials with bilingual instructions and some mother tongue explanations (USWE, 1992).

What goes into an ABE curriculum?

The second question concerns what to include in national ABE curriculum, who decides and how? This is a very complex issue, given the diversity of learner needs and contexts and at the same time, national priorities. For instance, the language, literacy and educational needs of a male industrial worker and a rural unemployed woman are usually very different. Yet national goals might dictate policies which favour the economic growth capacity of the male worker. Clearly, more research into needs and how a national system might take into account diversity and conflicting interests is urgently required.

Having said this, experience of working with a great variety of learners over the past 10 years has given us a general picture of needs to consider when deciding on a curriculum for adults.

People do not only need literacy and language skills; they also need a broad general education which includes such things as numeracy and map skills, history, health, and science, plus very important cognitive or thinking skills and metacognitive or learning skills. This broad general knowledge is an essential base for further learning, including the development of language and literacy skills. It is also inherent in the training of 'multi-skilled' workers to be able to problem-solve, to work effectively in a team, etc. In order to tackle this broad-based learning, a 'language across the curriculum' approach has been tried out with some success. Developing language and/or literacy skills while learning important concepts and general knowledge appears to provide learners with the motivation to explore, to hypothesise and to come to grips with the language and with the oral and written tools needed to express themselves in that language.

Competency-based course design and assessment

This third question asks whether ABE courses should be designed and assessed around competencies. Firstly, what do we mean by competencies—Skills? Tasks? Knowledge? Attitudes?

Figure 5—A competency-based approach for ABE?

A competency-based (CB) curriculum model is being proposed for adult learners in South Africa (Cosatu, 1991, 1992). However, very little research has been carried out into what this means for ABE, including the different interpretations and their advantages and disadvantages. On the surface, a CB approach appears conceptually neat, clear and simple. The focus on observable, easily assessed learning outcomes and the lack of attention to process or methodology makes this model appear very attractive to the policy-makers at the top. However, in practice, and if we delve beneath the surface features, a number of serious limitations are revealed. These are of a linguistic, educational and ideological nature (Auerbach, 1986; Clifford, 1991, 1992; Dubin, 1989; Perkins, 1992; Street, 1990).

3. Parallels and contrasts with ABE work in Australia

Questions and discussions ensued around the issues raised above, using the following questions to draw out the parallels and contrasts with the Australian situation.

- What kind of ABE system is evolving in Australia and how does this compare with the proposed system for South Africa?
- What kind of language policy and curriculum issues is Australia facing and how do these compare with South Africa?
- Should South Africa follow Australia's example?

Participants' contributions included the following comments:

- The South African situation is very different from Australia in terms of the client audience profile and the vast numbers of potential learners in South Africa (15 million as opposed to 1 million in Australia).
- The number of languages used in South Africa must have enormous financial implications and place a burden on teacher training providers.
- Medium of instruction has not been such a hot issue in Australia. Because Australian English is the national language, it is assumed that people will learn English and use it as the medium of instruction.
- Like South Africa, Australia has also suffered from the low status afforded literacy work in the past.
- In Australia the powerful shift towards work-based training and a competency-based model goes against the grain for many practitioners who are concerned with issues of process and empowerment. The people who are promoting a narrower vision are the politicians and the economists, not the educators or the linguists.

Conclusion

To the question 'Should South Africa follow the Australian path?' we concluded that although there were major differences between ABE in Australia and in South Africa, there were areas of overlap and shared concerns which could be exploited to the benefit of both countries.

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NSW inmate education: literacy in action in NSW correctional centres: a model

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Model focus

The purpose of this model is to provide a methodological framework to establish directions for NSW Inmate Education Programs. A distinct strategy and direction is essential to give integrity in the formation of a NSW Inmate Education Program.

Model components:

The model contains four elements, illustrated in Diagram 1.

1. Education determinants

These are the education characteristics that may be examined for their effects on the Inmate Education Program. Some of these variables have a potential for control by administrators or correctional educators.

2. Corrections context determinants

This range of determinants concerns the conditions to which correctional educators must adjust: the characteristics of the environment within which inmate education programs are planned, implemented and evaluated.

Normally, the correctional educator has little choice over its population, correctional facilities, budget allocations and must adjust to the changing context factors. Whether seen as welcome opportunities or irrelevant irritants, correctional educators must cope with contexts.

3. Correctional centre inmate education programs

These are the actual inmate education programs in Correctional Centres. It is what correctional educators and inmates do in the learning environment. The preceding Education and Correctional Context Determinants influence: Inmate Education Policy and Programs, the education management, action and corruption prevention plans.

4. Inmate education program outcomes

Outcomes are the Inmate Education Program results—those changes that come about as a consequence of involvement in courses. The most often discussed immediate benefits of education are: inmate learning in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills, and contribution to effective correctional centre management.

There are also long term goals of education, these need to be considered in relation to both: Education and Corrections Context Determinants and the Inmate Education Program.

The Model in action

Directed by our focus, which is to provide a framework for developing NSW Inmate Education Programs, the model can be applied by collecting information related to the Education and Correction Context Determinants. It could be compared to conducting intelligence gathering or a literature search.

The data collection provides a basis by which Inmate Education Program principles, values, issues and options can be developed and tested. It also gives a basis for discussions with stakeholders.

Following consultation, and considering the options, conclusions should be reached regarding the most appropriate institutional program.

Finally, an Action Plan is derived (Diagram 2).

Conclusion

This framework for a NSW Inmate Education Program Model aims to meet emerging challenges, in the dynamic NSW correctional environment towards the year 2000.

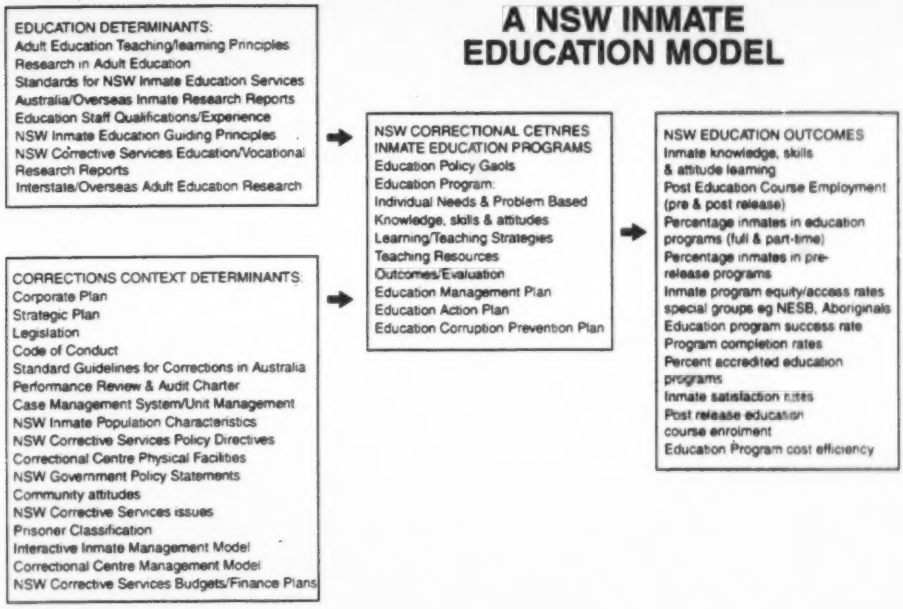

Diagram 1

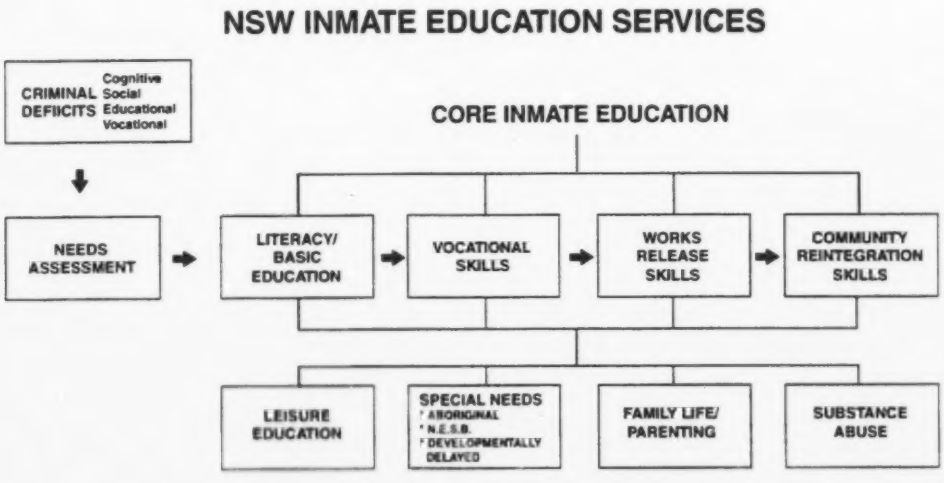

Diagram 2